

**Opening of Ninoy Aquino GK Village
Concepcion, Tarlac
August, 21, 2008
By
Ken Kashiwahara**

Governor Yap, Mayor Villanueva, Congressman Lapus, members of the Gawad Kalinga family, Ladies and gentlemen.

Exactly twenty five years and a few hours ago, Ninoy's plane descended into Philippine airspace, in the skies very close to here. Inside the plane, I turned to talk to him in the seat beside me. But I stopped because he was deep in prayer. It was the third time that day he had prayed the rosary. His faith was very strong and very real. The day was filled with uncertainty yet Ninoy was full of hope. He was convinced that he could return freedom and democracy to his country and human dignity to his people. He was the one bright shining light in the darkness of dictatorship. So when that light was snuffed out so suddenly and so brutally, it became a tragedy of epic proportions, for our family and especially for his country.



Ken Kashiwahara

After Ninoy's funeral, Lupita and I returned to our home in San Francisco and as our plane taxied past the spot on the tarmac where Ninoy had been shot, I stared out the window and vowed to channel my anger into a mission: to keep his memory and his message alive so that his death would not have been in vain.

So for 24 years, we commemorated his death anniversary with a mass and a gathering of Ninoy's friends and supporters. But for this 25th anniversary, we wanted something even more meaningful, a lasting legacy, something that would symbolize what Ninoy stood for and believed in: to make the Philippines a better place, to give Filipinos a better life.



**Ninoy Aquino banner flying
at the Ninoy Aquino GK
village**

So when Lupita suggested building a Ninoy village through Gawad Kalinga, I jumped at the chance, even though I knew raising the money wouldn't be easy. And it wasn't. We gave talks about GK and Ninoy in New York and Chicago and San Francisco. We wrote countless letters to everyone we could think of. But because GK has been so successful around the world, potential donors would often say, sorry, we've already given to Gawad Kalinga. But we were determined and yes, we persevered.

From the beginning, both of us had been inspired by the GK program and by Tony Meloto's vision. We had been impressed by the sacrifice and dedication of the GK family and its army of volunteers. In fact, several years ago, we had contributed to a GK village in Pampanga.

Sacrifice, human dignity, nation building, love of country. It is what Gawad Kalinga stands for and, in a way, what Ninoy died for. What better marriage of the two Filipino patriots -- Ninoy and GK -- than this village.

A year ago, we started pursuing our dream. Today we stand here in the Ninoy Aquino GK Village, our dream realized, with a sense of accomplishment and profound gratitude.

So, Lupita and I would like to thank everyone who helped make it possible: all our donors listed on the plaque, those who shared our dream, especially President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo for her very generous support;

Manny Pangilinan and the PLDT SMART Foundation for donating 10 of the homes; and Isabel and Francisco Juan, our very good friends in Chicago, who donated 8 others. Of course, we needed all 37 donors to succeed and I'd like to recognize those who are here today: Congressman Jeci Lapus; Susan and Fred Aquitania, who traveled 7000 miles from San Francisco to be with us; Ninoy's siblings, Paul Aquino, Tessie Oreta and Ditas Aquino. Ninoy's niece Rina Quinto and her husband Eli and Christine Concio, wife of Ninoy's nephew Vincent.

We'd also like to thank the GK family of staff and volunteers who worked to build this village and especially Tony Meloto for inspiring us. We'd like to thank Mayor Villanueva for donating the land. And of course, Ninoy for his vision.

So as we commemorate Ninoy's 25th death anniversary today, we pray and hope that the new residents of Ninoy's village will live their new lives with the same gospel values that Ninoy lived his: a life based on love for God, their neighbors and their country.

Thank you.