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The Moskito Welder

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Bangar is famous for its *abel* and *panday* products. Townspeople take pride of the municipality's expertise in weaving and metal crafts. Visitors, tourists and local buyers alike purposely go to Bangar to enjoy the collection of woven designs and purchase their pick.

As for the metal trade, local and remote farmers depend on Bangar folks on their agricultural needs. The town is also home to top caliber welders, trained by years of experience in their craft.

In barangay Cadapli, a welder of such renown is now the number one recourse of individuals and organizations alike in their welding needs.

He is Nicasio Moskito, an unusual name for a typical iron worker but extraordinary enough to become master of the metal trade and eventually be the welding czar both rich and poor Bangarians go to.



Growing of the 'Moskito'

Martin is he called by his people, including clients in Bangar extending beyond La Union. The name seems incredibly different from 'Nicasio' but it does fit the 'fighter' in him, an attitude characteristic of a warrior which the name 'Martin' comes from.

Martin's celebrated welding career started in 1987, when he was 19 years old, fresh from his two-year Diesel Mechanic course. He worked as a mechanic, welder, and driver in Quezon City for free. "I treated it as my training ground. I welcomed the opportunity," was all Martin said.



For five years, he did not have money of his own. But for five years of experience, he acquired and developed an expertise that foreign and local clients, including his own people would benefit from in the coming years.

The Moskito flies

Martin's first break in his career brought him flying to Saudi Arabia for a formal, 'paid' job, of course, a welding job. "*Sa awa ng Diyos, naumpisahan kong ipagawa etong bahay namin,*" he gestured toward his yet unfinished house, where he, his wife and four children happily live.

When he arrived from Saudi in 1999, Martin decided he'd had enough of working for foreigners. After seven years of welding irons in construction sites in the Arabian deserts, Martin finally came home to Bangar, for good.

Moskito Shop

The putting up of a shop wasn't at all planned. But when neighbors came one by one to Martin for their welding needs and he couldn't refuse, a business was born. At first, the workplace was just a nine-square meter area outside their house. Customers soon came piling in and eventually, Martin's hand tools multiplied to accommodate clients' different service needs. Weeks after his arrival from Saudi Arabia, the concept of bossing his own welding shop became reality.

In 2000, Martin's trade officially got a name: *Nicasio Welding Shop*. The Moskito welder started with his simple mechanical and hand tools. He managed to get along for two years. But his income fell short of his growing family's needs. With the limited hand machines and tools he had in his 'little' shop, he could only accommodate as many clients as he could service.

And just as the Moskito was about to buzz off, DOST came to the rescue.

DOSTying the welder

After two years of struggling to make ends meet, Martin found his blessing in a friend who referred him to the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) who was then offering grants to qualified small and medium enterprises.

In 2012, Martin applied for assistance through DOST's Small Enterprises Technology Upgrading Program (SETUP). His request was immediately granted after complying with all the requirements. Martin was able to avail himself of a P100 thousand worth of equipment payable in three years. DOST- La Union gave him a welding machine, grinder, drill, compressor, and Z-bar cutter, all amounting to the applied amount.

DOST La Union's assistance was not pegged at loaning Martin the hundred thousand worth of welding equipment. Trainings, seminars, and consultancy services for the Moskito Welder and his men are part of the SETUP bundle Martin availed.

Like the Noto Mechanic of Bangar, the Moskito Welder doesn't have ads or sign boards to campaign for clients. What he has, though, is a record of quality service which one satisfied customer passes through word of mouth to another. Each of them has a good story to tell about the good experience of doing a project with Martin, one good enough to make them go back to him for their future welding needs and refer him to others.

Among his bestseller services include making steel windows, window grills, steel trusses, and roofings. The superior way Martin does his craft extends his market from La Union to Ilocos Sur, Nueva Ecija, and parts of the Cordilleras.

A couple of weeks with DOST in the scene, the Moskito family started to feel the difference in their shop's income. The previous P15-20 thousand networth a month ballooned into as high a net income as P45-50 thousand, a cut from a gross of up to a hundred thousand pesos. In fact, a contract now gets him as high as half a million pesos.

What used to be single-man team, only occasionally assisted by out-of-school nephews, is now a shop of eight men, all assured of a sustainable job, aside from being provided free accommodations at Martin's house.

"Malaki ang nagawa ng DOST sa buhay naming pamilya. Nagprovide na nga ng gamit, hands-on pa sa shop namin para gabayan kami," declared Martin who is now a constant donor and sponsor of barangay Cadapli during big events.

"Ngayon, ramdam ko ang gaan ng pakiramdam dahil nakakatulong ako sa aking mga kababayan sa halip na pabigat sa lipunan. At ipinagpapasalamat ko ito sa DOST," the Moskito Welder added.

With more help from DOST, Martin hopes to put up an additional shop so he could hire more people. *Nicasio Welding Shop* is right now in need of more skilled welders. And the Moskito patriarch said he plans to train men in his barangay who have no job so that he can hire them and be part of his projects.

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