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## Crafting Furniture Strengthens This Vigan Carpenter's Family

*By Imelda Castro-Rivero*

Skillful hands, responsible attitude, diligence, patience, belief in God. All of these are the fine qualities of 60 years old Teodorico Alcantara, Sr of Nagsangalan, Vigan City. Because of these beautiful traits he and his wife raised their six children until they graduated from college.

'I wanted my children to experience being in a foreign country so I was determined to make success in my small furniture shop,' he narrated. Now, Irene, 37, is a US citizen and Maribel, 35, is an Australian citizen. His two daughters have been helping him with the capital and equipment of his shop since they became stable abroad.

The other children, although college graduates, Leila, Teodorico, Jr and Jay, are all helping in the shop.

Being a graduate of building construction in the old Ilocos Trade School, now the UNP, he managed to operate his shop alone. This was in 1995 after a year working as a messenger in Israel.

He started his shop in his own house with only himself doing all the carpentry and finishing works for tables, chairs, cabinets, beds, doors, windows, and other wooden furniture. He partnered with friends who are also furniture makers in San Vicente town which is known as the wooden furniture capital of Ilocos Sur. With them he sold his products in Manila and Baguio.

He gathered wood from those who sold wood extracted from old houses. These are pure hard wood of olden times which are perfect for furniture making. They are narra, guiho, yakal, tanggili, and sagat. Or from people who come to his shop and sell him gmelina, acacia and mahogany.

For seven years he worked in his little shop at home, but because neighbors got disturbed, he transferred it to an isolated area near the provincial road in the same barangay. Here, he was visited by DOST Provincial Director Ramon Sumabat and helped him get a grant for additional equipment that will hasten his carpentry job. It was in February 2011 that DOST surprised him with the equipment.

### DOST arrives with helpful equipment

He was grateful of DOST because orders were increasing and his tools and equipment were not enough to cope with the demand.

With the endorsement of DOST 1 Review and Technical Evaluation Committee, the furniture shop of Mr. Alcantara was assisted through the Regional GIA program with funding of PhP 162,815.20. This amount was used for one unit router, one unit press drill, one unit air compressor with spray gun and one unit planer.



"The equipment provided by DOST are huge helpers for me. It is now so easy to drill, spray and do other carpentry jobs with the press drill, router, air compressor with spray and the planer," he said.

He now accepts more orders as the production process is shortened. Volume of production and capacity increased by 25 percent, from 200 board feet he now uses 250 of wood per month. Walk-in customers increased by 100 percent. Gross sales increased by 59 percent as compared to the first semester of 2011. The net profit, Mr. Alcantara attested a 172 percent increase per month. The increase in demand pushed him to get another worker and expand his production area.

"I did not expect the DOST grant. I could not even believe it then. My fellow shop owners and I were astounded because the government helped me. They told me how lucky I was. Until now I feel so blessed with this help from the government," he gratefully shared.

## Inspiring other carpenters to get DOST help

Without any 'crab mentality' Alcantara is enthusiastic in encouraging fellow carpenters to apply for DOST grant. "I advise those who are carpenters like me who want to start their own shops to start small. And they only need diligence, patience, faith in their own selves, and faith in God. I started with only a small capital but poured in a huge amount of diligence, patience, determination, and faith in God."

His DOST grant and tenacity in his own shop inspired fellow carpenters to start their own shops. "With God's blessings, other carpenters I know were inspired to put up their shop. They are in barangays Nalasin, and Purok here in Vigan, and also in San Vicente. I advised them to seek DOST's help."

For almost perfect furniture items, he does not believe in cutting production time, even if customers want 'rush' products. "To maintain the shop, I improved and improved in the manner I do my carpentry jobs. The products should be solid, polished, almost perfect. Be it for local use or for export. No rush rush job for me. There is a time to reach the finesse which define my furniture."

"When I receive orders, particularly big orders, I ask for 30 percent deposit. Before, I was not still asking deposits, there was a time that a client did not get his order, so I have to dispose of the furniture myself. If I can't sell it that's not good for the shop."

Today, he is thankful for what DOST granted him, and is contented with it. "What I received from DOST is enough for me. I dare not ask for more. Other should be given grants, too. The status of my shop now is enough for me".

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