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## The House of Wax



A raging fire that did not content with burning down a house but also had to engulf in its blaze the household's matriarch, sparked the start of a wax business in Naguilian, La Union upon which Catholic churches in the region including those nearby, would depend for candle supply.

The family of Domingo and Davita Argueza make and sell candles for a living. The candle industry has been their bread and butter for 15 years. It was the candles that sent their daughter to school and provide for the special needs of their special child, their youngest. It was the same candles that rebuilt their old house which was devoured by fire. The family had gone through its own share of misfortunes in sustaining the industry they enduringly labored to keep.

Husband and wife named it *Cylver Ilocandia Candle and Wax*, after the combined names of their children. Mang Domingo had mastered candle production as a bachelor. He learned the skill through a neighbor who taught him everything he needed to start a business.

"*Mahirap sa simula lalo na kapag walang suporta ang pamilya,*" said Mang Domingo who held on to candle-making because there was no other means to earn income. Education was not afforded him. His was a bleak future that his white, red, yellow, and orange candles brightened.

### A life re-candled

For 10 years, *Cylver Ilocandia* fared with producing candles for a steady market: the Catholic Churches in the municipality which for a time spread out to churches in nearby towns through word of mouth by priests in the diocese. Business returns were tight, stretched to suffice for the mounting costs of production and labor, not to include the increasing needs of his growing family. But somehow they got by. This had been their state of affairs.

Until, in 2009 when the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) brought more than a flicker of light to his wax business.

DOST's SETUP was a package answering to all of Mang Domingo's waxy concerns. SETUP is DOST's term for Small Enterprises Technology Upgrading Program. It is the agency's response to the needs of small and medium enterprises for sustained growth, productivity, and competitiveness. SETUP offers SMEs innovative technologies to improve their operations; manpower training, technical assistance and consultancy services; package and label designs; assistance in the establishment of product standards including testing; database management system; and limited funds for technology acquisition.

By DOST La Union Provincial Director Dr. Ismael Gurtiza's guidance and assistance, Mang Domingo woke up to quite many significant information that he thought were missing in his years of candle production. The most important of all was the technology introduced him through trainings and seminars. He used to focus on the entire candle-making process, oblivious of the equally important facets of production. He came

to understand the need for occupational health and safety, bookkeeping, and other technical information necessary in his kind of enterprise, all provided by DOST.

Next to knowledge is the material support of the agency. Mang Domingo's candle business was fortunate to be awarded grants in the form of equipment needed for his business: metal molders of different sizes, wicks, and paraffin wax all adding up to P120,000. The amount was to be refunded in three years without interest.



The former measly income of P20,000 ballooned into a mouth-gaping P100,000. The churches he used to supply with candles in Naguilian and neighboring towns multiplied. Aside from La Union, he is now the exclusive supplier of candles to Catholic Churches in the Northern Ilocos Region – Sinait, Magsingal, Cabugao, Bantay, San Vicente, Vigan, Narvacan, Santiago, Sta. Lucia, and Sta. Cruz. His name has reached even Baguio City Churches – Our Lady of Atonement Cathedral known as the Baguio Cathedral, Our Lady of Lourdes, St. Joseph Parish in Pacdal, and the Bishop House.

“Churches have continuous need of candles,” Mang Domingo explained why he didn’t sell to groceries. “And churches are not choosy,” he added revealing that his products are recycled.

Every church delivery meant 50 boxes of candles of all sizes or a net profit of about P35,000. And considering the number of churches under Mang Domingo's market list, he needed to double his time in production.

So he hired relatives who needed the job. At the very least, Mang Domingo needed to produce 8,000 to 10,000 candles each day. And these families helped him to come up with the demanded number of candles. It didn’t matter whether these people went to school or not, physically whole or otherwise. It mattered that they knew the ways of the candle.

Now, with the entire lent amount returned to DOST, *Cylver Ilocandia* remains one of Naguilian, La Union’s economic pillar. And it shall remain so as long as DOST remains on its side for technology and information updates, including equipment support.

Mang Domingo’s candle business continues to fire up lives through earnings his workers make of it. It was wax that once devoured a house and its owner, but it is the same wax that has rebuilt not only one but many homes through its light.

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