

# Alison Jean Mendoza heeds Gawad Kalinga's call for volunteerism

**A**lison Jean Mendoza looked forward to a restful 14-hour flight to Manila on Thursday night. It would be her third visit to her parents' home country. Born in Nebraska 26 years ago, she and her family moved to Raleigh, North Carolina in 1997, after she graduated from high school. She attended the University of Maryland and graduated in 2004 with a Bachelor of Science, major in Biology and minor in Spanish.



Alison Jean Mendoza and ANCOF Director of Development Jonathan Wittig.  
AJ Press photos by Rene Villaroman

by RENE VILLAROMAN  
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Alison Jean Mendoza, Seafood City-sponsored volunteer for the Gawad Kalinga (GK) Builders Corps meets the press at Max's Restaurant, at the Ground Level, Puente Hills Mall, 1600 S. Azusa Avenue, City of Industry, CA 91746.

nership with the local government," Munda said.

"We invite volunteers - high school and college students - who are willing to give one week a month to help with GK's different programs," Munda implored. GK had been successful in attracting volunteers like Alison during the last few years. Eleanor Chichioco of New Jersey was living the New Yorker dream with a glamorous job in Manhattan and was jet-setting around the USA. She was inspired to leave that lifestyle and dedicated two years of her life as a GK volunteer, helping the Philippines rise from poverty. In the process, she found her identity.

Concert and operatic singer Stephanie Reese lost the love of her life in a tragic car accident. To find closure, she volunteered and shared her talents to GK. She found healing and found her voice again. "I think so many people in this world do not realize the joy that they will receive from giving that they cannot receive in any other way - the joy that is beyond wealth," she shared.

Jonathan Wittig, ANCOF Development Director, had worked in Mindanao last year, helping to unite Muslims and Christians together. "I really do enjoy Mindanao quite a bit," said the Chicago native and Loyola University Bachelor of Arts in International Marketing graduate. "I was extremely involved in social justice and giving service to others." He was a leader of Youth for Christ (YFC), a founding component of GK, and had spent six months in the Philippines last year, immersed in GK's build-a-school program. "I knew that there was nothing I would want to do except to work with GK's projects that are so special and serve so many people," Wittig said.

"I am going to miss air conditioning," said Alison in jest, explaining she would not have the amenities of her Washington, D.C. apartment in her adaptive home in the Philippines. "I've been leaning towards doing an international service for quite sometime," Alison said. In D.C. she had worked with Food and Friends, a non-profit organization, and when that project ended on August 6, she looked around and honed in on GK, partly due to her mother's and her former classmates' recommendations. Alison would finance her Philippine stay with savings while staying with a host family in Manila.



Alison Jean Mendoza accepts \$1000 stipend from Vincent Tarroja, Director - Seafood City's Strategic Planning & Marketing Group.

Seafood City Supermarkets, which partnered with GK as a corporate sponsor about two years ago, has paid for Alison's airline ticket to Manila via the Philippine Airlines (PAL). The supermarket chain also gave her a stipend of \$1,000, which was presented to her on Wednesday by Vincent "Bing" Tarroja, head of Strategic Planning and Marketing of the Seafood City Group of Companies.

"I have wanted to do some international service for a few years," said Alison. "My parents were active in GK in North Carolina, and my mother told me that she heard about GK's village-building program, and she directed me to the website," Alison relates. "It sounded like something down my alley." ■

"I'm really excited to go to the Philippines, partly to learn more about where my parents came from; I think that it will be an enriching experience," Alison told a reporter during a merienda at Max's Restaurant in Puente Hills Mall on Wednesday.

This time around, Alison would be staying in the Philippines for a year, maybe even longer, if she decides to extend her assignment as a volunteer for the Gawad Kalinga's village-building project in the Philippines. Alison will be involved in GK's health program in communities that the organization is building for the poorest Filipinos. She will be based in Manila during the first two months of her stint, and will be sent to different villages in each region for periods of two weeks each month to contribute her social work background to GK's health programs.

A health program is one of the components of GK's community-building project. "Right now, there are 1700 (GK) villages in almost all the provinces," explains Rick Munda, a Regional Director of Answering the Cry of the Poor (ANCOP), a GK partner. "In GK, we aim for a sustainable village development," he said. "We provide for youth development, pre-school care; we provide for a health component, livelihood and productivity for the villages; and value formation for the beneficiaries. It's really a part-

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