

Promoting the Better Side of the Philippines



You will learn to appreciate your country more when you experience working abroad.

This was what former overseas Filipino worker Rebecca Bustamante realized when she came back to the Philippines with her family after more than 10 years of living abroad. And this was also one of the reasons why she and her Canadian husband, Richard Mills, put up Asia CEO Forum, the largest business forum in the Philippines that aims to promote the country as a viable business destination.

"I've been abroad for many years and I used to hear a lot of negative things about Filipinos," Bustamante said. "I wanted to do something to tell them the positive side of

the Philippines."

Bustamante became president of the Asia CEO Forum. When she and her husband first set up Asia CEO Forum in 2009, they wanted it to be more than just a regular business forum. Their vision was to invite expatriate-CEOs of multinational firms doing business in the Philippines so that they could share their experiences on doing business in the country. They posted the forums in their website and in YouTube hoping to spread the good news about the Philippines as a premier business destination in Asia.

The first speaker that she invited was from American insurance company AIG. It turned out to be one of the most difficult times for the speaker because it was at that time that news about the problems of several large financial institutions surfaced, among them

AIG.

“It was Duncan Webb who was our speaker and we asked him if he would still want to push through as speaker for the Asia CEO Forum because of what happened, and he still bravely faced the crowd,” Bustamante said.

When news came out that the regional head of AIG would come out in the forum, everybody wanted to hear what he had to say. The result was a very successful first forum, attended by CEOs from the different industries like mining, BPOs, engineering and manufacturing, among others.

“We had a full house of about 120 top executives who attended the forum,” Bustamante said.

The first year saw the Asia CEO Forum being held monthly at the Tower Club in Makati. As the number of attendees grew, Bustamante said that they had to find a bigger location and transferred to the nearby Dusit Hotel.

The forum is now being held regularly at the Alphaland Tower to accommodate an expanding number of attendees.

Bustamante said that they were able to get a large following because their main business, executive headhunting, enables them to tap into their own network and expand through other industries along the way. Today, their roster of speakers and attendees cut across all the major industries in the Philippines.

The positive response and their rapid growth also led them to eventually put up Asia CEO Awards.

“Our mission was to promote the Philippines as a premier business destination in Asia and to recognize the Filipino achievers. So along with some friends, we started organizing the very first annual awards in 2010,” Bustamante said.

Their first awards event, held at the Dusit Hotel, drew a crowd of about 350, while the second, held at the Marriott Hotel at the Resorts World in 2011, drew in 600 attendees. This year, they are expecting 1,500 guests to the 3rd Asia CEO Awards, which will be held at the Performing Arts Theater of the Resorts World on November 8. Bustamante promises the awards night to be the biggest and grandest to date.

The awards, while initiated mostly by Bustamante and Mills, is actually a group collaboration of representatives from the American, Canadian, Japanese and Korean Chambers of Commerce and three Filipinos, including economist Dr. Bernard Villegas, Francis Estrada from the Asian Institute of Management and Architect Jun Palafox, who is a past president of the Management Association of the Philippines.

Bustamante said that this year, they have increased the categories from seven to ten,

including Top Employer of the Year, Executive Leadership Team of the Year and the Global Filipino.

With all these developments, Bustamante couldn't be happier.

"I'm glad perceptions have now changed and we are now seen as one of the rising stars in Asia," she said .