

# Vietnamese immigrant a hero to Amerasians

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Growing up in Vietnam as the daughter of a native woman and a U.S. serviceman she never met, Ly Ly recalled, she was thought of as a second-class citizen. Many Vietnamese prized ethnic purity, she noted, and she was seen as less than ideal.

According to Ly — and other Amerasians — prejudice made it difficult for Amerasians to find work and get schooling in their homeland. Such attitudes made Ly want to leave Vietnam and move to the United States, which she did in 1991.

Ly, 27, currently resides in Avon with her U.S. sponsors, Raymond and Georgianna Delles, and recently became a registered nurse. She characterized the attitudes of many of her fellow Vietnamese toward her and other Amerasians in Vietnam in these words:

"Of course we would end up being 'bad' children because we started out being 'bad,'" Ly said.

One Vietnamese man who never shared this view is Tien Ngo, a job counselor in Catholic Family Center's Refugee & Immigration Department. The CFC hired Ngo as a case manager in 1990 to deal specifically with Amerasians, although he has since helped refugees from such nations as Iraq and Liberia as well.

Ngo estimated he has helped more than 200 Amerasians find employment, as well as fulfill other needs like housing, in the Rochester area.

A parishioner at St. Anthony of Padua Church — which is spiritual home to a large Vietnamese Catholic community in Rochester — Ngo is married with two children. A cheerful, friendly man, Ngo regularly reads the Bible and believes his Catholic faith compels him to shun prejudice — not people.

"At the time I was in Vietnam, I didn't know who was Amerasian and who was Vietnamese," he said.

Amerasians are generally young, hard-working, street-smart people who are eager to make it in the United States, Ngo said. Born during the U.S. war in Vietnam that ended in 1973, many were shunned by their mothers' families and wound up on the street, he noted. Growing up in such circumstances has made Amerasians able to endure much, he said.

"They can find a way to survive in any situation," he said. "I like to work with them because they have nothing to hide. They are very strong and have energy to do things."

Ironically, once known in Vietnam as "Children of the Dust," Amerasians are now known as "Golden Children," Ngo said. That's because changes in U.S. immigration law during the 1980s gave visa preferences to the relatives of U.S. servicemen — in other words, Amerasians and their Vietnamese families, he said. Families that once



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

**Tien Ngo looks through lists of Amerasians he's helped to find employment in the region. He is a job counselor at the Catholic Family Center's Refugee and Immigration Department.**

shunned their half-American relatives now seek them out, he said, hoping they may serve as a ticket out of Vietnam to the United States.

Ngo has met with Amerasians everywhere, in their homes, their worksites and their places of worship, he said — even in jail, where a few unfortunately landed. In addition to helping some find jobs, Ngo said he often serves as a peacemaker and troubleshooter for Amerasians, mediating disputes they have with employers, landlords, the police and each other.

For example, he said, workers born in the United States can generally accept being dressed down by a boss before others for such infractions as being late to work. But, he continued, many Vietnamese would consider such an employer's action to be disrespectful, and simply not show up for work the next day. He's had to teach both immigrants and their U.S. employers to understand where the other is coming from, and adjust their behaviors accordingly, Ngo said.

He added that one Amerasian came to him distraught after his employer chastised him for bringing beer to work and drinking it on his lunch hour. In Vietnam, many people drink during the workday, he said, but he had to explain to the immigrant that many U.S. employers frown on such practices.

Although Ngo has not suffered the ostracization in his homeland that Amerasians have, his own life has had its share of challenges. Born in 1951 near Hanoi, Vietnam's capital, Ngo moved to South Vietnam with his family in

1954 along with several thousand other Catholics who left communist North Vietnam when the nation was divided. When communists took over South Vietnam in 1975, Ngo said life wasn't too difficult at first, but gradually, the economy worsened, and by 1977, he decided to leave.

"I wanted to be a free man, to do whatever I wanted," he said. "I wanted to control my life, to get an education."

Ngo paid to travel on a boat to Malaysia, where he lived in a refugee camp for one year. He then emigrated to the United States, and he settled in Chicago. He eventually attended the University of Iowa, where he obtained a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering.

Recruited by Kodak, Ngo moved to Rochester in 1985 and worked at Kodak as a quality control inspector until he was laid off in 1989. He then went to work for CFC, and has become a well-respected member of the Vietnamese community in Rochester for his work there, according to Ha Nguyen, diocesan director of the Office of Asian-Pacific Ministries.

"I know he cares a lot for the Amerasians," she said. "They have come to respect him."

Tuan Tran is one such Amerasian who attends church with Ngo at St. Anthony's, which hosts an 11 a.m. Vietnamese Mass every Sunday. The young man found his job in Rochester with Ngo's help and praised him for the efforts Ngo made on his behalf.

"I know him a lot, and I heard a lot of people talk about him," said Tran who works for a local paper company. "He's a really good person."

In addition to his job, Ngo also serves his fellow immigrants through volunteer activities at St. Anthony's, where he's helped to organize a 30-member Vietnamese Catholic Youth Association. Made up of teenagers and young adults, the association organizes soccer and volleyball matches as well as other social events, Ngo said.

Ly, who sings with St. Anthony's Vietnamese choir, has participated in youth association activities, and praised Ngo for his enthusiasm.

"He's pretty fun to work with, and he's very good at encouraging you to get involved," she said.

Ngo also works with a group of Rochester Vietnamese who have published newsletters highlighting the immigrant community's activities in upstate New York, he said. His dedication to the Vietnamese immigrant community has earned him notice, Nguyen said, but Ngo tends to eschew the spotlight.

"I don't think he likes to be seen as a leader," she said. "I think he likes to work in the background."

Ngo summed up the reasons for his dedication by pointing to his nature and his belief in Christ.

"I like to help people," he said. "I like to work with people more than myself. Anything I can do to help people, I am happy to do it."

## Demonstrations will mark Roe v. Wade's 25th anniversary

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

As Jan. 22, the 25th anniversary of two Supreme Court decisions legalizing abortion throughout the land approaches, activists nationwide are preparing to demonstrate against abortion in Washington, D.C., that day.

Several buses carrying pro-life demonstrators are slated to leave from churches and other sites in the Diocese of Rochester on the evening of Jan. 21.

Participants in the Washington demonstration will meet with U.S. representatives and senators to lobby for pro-life legislation, according to the diocesan Consistent Life Ethic Office. Diocesan Catholics interested in participating in the demonstration are welcome to take buses leaving from the following churches on Wednesday evening, Jan. 21. They should contact in advance the persons listed:

- Corpus Christi, 864 E. Main St., Rochester. Carol Crossed, 716/442-8497.
- St. John of Rochester, 8 Wickford Way, Fairport. Earl Knab, 716/248-5993.
- St. Jude, 4100 Lyell Road, Rochester. Bernice Kleinhammer, 716/247-4322.
- St. Pius the Tenth, 3032 Chili Ave., Rochester. Amy Dorschied, 716/247-2566 or 716/586-3956.
- St. Rita, 1008 Maple Drive, Webster. Ed Franus, 716/671-1100.
- St. Thomas the Apostle, 4536 St. Paul Blvd., Irondequoit. Dorothy Hayes,

716/342-4175, or Mary Jo Maurer, 716/342-2323 or 342-3216.

St. Mary's, 35 Center St., Waterloo. Don or Kathy Peters, 315/539-8006 or 315/539-8860.

Wegmans, Clemens Center Parkway, Elmira. Gail Hall, 607/732-3162.

Participants may be asked to pay \$25 to \$37 to defray the cost of the buses. Services will be held at each of the churches before the buses depart. People who wish to sponsor a demonstrator for \$35 may call Carol Crossed at 716/442-8497.

For those unable to go to Washington, St. Theodore's Church, 168 Spencerport Road, Gates, will hold a pro-life Mass with Father Anthony Mugavero at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 21, a 24-hour prayer vigil and a concluding prayer service at 7 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 22. For information, call Sister Barbara Bartkowiak, OSF, at 716/429-6811.

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For other questions about pro-life activities this month in the diocese, call Father Jim Hewes at 716/442-4390.

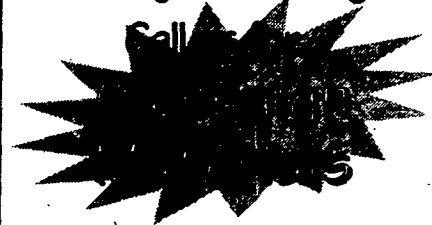
The activities included plans for Bishop Matthew H. Clark Jan. 13 to celebrate a Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral in Rochester. The Mass was planned in memory of the aborted, and for the healing of those affected by abortion.

During the fourth week of January, parishes are being asked to discuss signing the Community Pledge to Life — written by the diocese — by Mother's Day this year. The pledge is based on a pastoral letter that Bishop Kenneth Untener of Saginaw, Mich., wrote in 1991. The letter

asked Catholics to help women in crisis pregnancies.

The pledge states a parish will stand by a woman in a crisis pregnancy by providing such practical assistance as transportation and financial help as well as by aiding women who are experiencing family difficulties because of their pregnancies.

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