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## Domestic Health Division's Hao Nguyen Leads Effort to Build Libraries in Vietnam

April 9, 2007

When Hao Nguyen is not working in the Domestic Health Division of Abt Associates as a Research Analyst, she is building libraries in the rural areas of Vietnam. Hao co-founded, with her fiancé, the Vietnam Library Association (VLA), an organization that is devoted to strengthening the education of Vietnam citizens by building libraries in communities where they are greatly needed. Hao hopes to engage the Abt Associates community in her philanthropic work by inviting staff members to attend VLA's Launch Fundraiser on May 11 th at MIT's Morse Hall.

Hao and her fiancé, Christopher Donald, came up with the idea of the VLA while visiting Hao's extended family in Ca Mau, a province on the southern tip of Vietnam. While there, Hao and Christopher purchased books for Hao's cousins in a bookstore in Ho Chi Minh City. These books were extremely appreciated by their recipients and Hao thought why not expand this concept to include all of the people in the communities of Ca Mau and get others to help contribute to the funding. There is an astonishing 90% literacy rate in the areas VLA is targeting, suggesting a prime market for books. However, there is a great shortage of libraries in the rural areas of southern Vietnam as most were destroyed as a result of conflicts with the French and the Vietnam War. Of the 14 libraries that remain in Ca Mau and its neighbor



Hao Nguyen with her cousin

Province Bac Lieu, many are specifically academic or scientific and are not meant for public use. Bookstores are also sparse and are not affordable to the rural Vietnamese citizen.

12 volunteers, 2 land donations and permits for the first library in Ca Mau later, Hao and Christopher have grown a solid network of supporters dedicated to the mission of their organization. There is a project team in Vietnam who is working with the local community and government officials to secure permits for additional libraries and collect bids. Hao is building affiliate groups in cities across the country to run their own fundraising initiatives in support of the effort.



Computer rendered design of library's structure

Hao and Christopher are emphasizing local collaboration for the development of libraries. They have worked with community leaders to develop the first library, and going forward, they plan to involve the local citizens in the selection of books, resources, and library programs. The goal for the first library is to raise \$40,000 of which \$30,000 is relegated to construction costs. A small portion will go to administrative costs for fundraising events, and the remainder will pay for books, computers, and other amenities they plan to provide. VLM aims to eventually build an endowment for the continued operations of the library so costs will not be passed on to the community. The aggressive growth plan aims to have the first library open by the end of 2007 with 2-3 libraries the following year and 3-6 libraries by year three.

Hao estimates 400 attendees at the VLA Launch Fundraiser on May 11<sup>th</sup> from 7:30-10:30, which she has been planning in collaboration with MIT's Vietnamese Students Association. The event will be held at MIT's regal Morse Hall. There will be talks from highly acclaimed Vietnamese-American authors Linh Đinh and Bich Minh Nguyen. In addition to the featured speakers there will be a selection of Vietnamese food. For more information about the Vietnamese Library Association, ways to contribute, and details about the Launch Fundraiser, contact [Hao Nguyen](#) or visit the VLA website at [www.vietnamlibrary.org](http://www.vietnamlibrary.org).

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