

Following pinks to the Philippines



By Dr. Nina Schlossman

Dr. Nina Schlossman is ASMI's Nutrition and Food Aid consultant and president of Global Food and Nutrition, based in Washington, D.C.

When Natalia Povelite was growing up in Kodiak, Alaska, where her mother, Leslie, captained a salmon seiner, she could not have imagined that at 25, she would participate in Alaska's first donation of canned pink salmon to the Philippines in response to one of the most destructive typhoons. Today, Natalia and her sister, Lainey, carry on their parents' tradition of harvesting salmon in Kodiak.

As one of our team, Natalia's fishing background and knowledge of salmon proved invaluable on a recent trip to Northern Cebu and Leyte to meet the recipients and make sure the donation supported the reconstruction efforts. This visit was part of our decade-long work with Bruce Schactler, director of the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute's

4.1 million people missing or displaced and more than 6,000 dead. The typhoon affected 16 million people, according to the U.S. Agency for International Development. Fishing is one of their primary livelihoods and source of sustenance; on



average, Filipinos consume 3.1 million tons of fish a year. The coastal fishing industry in the north was devastated, with more than 100,000 boats destroyed and 30,000 small fishing vessels damaged.

Alaska Gov. Sean Parnell recognized the need and harnessed Alaska's fishermen and processors to extend a helping hand to the people of the Philippines. Many people involved in Alaska's fisheries have a Filipino heritage, particularly in the processing sector, and have close family ties to those affected by the typhoon. When the state tapped the ASMI Global Food Aid Program to facilitate a donation of Alaska canned pink salmon for the typhoon victims, Schactler and I set out to identify a trusted organization to receive the donation.

The Salesian Missions, with whom we have worked for more than 10 years, and their local partner, Don Bosco Direct, matched the criteria for targeting

the neediest communities that had been missed by other organizations. The donation was timed for May 2014 to support their reconstruction efforts in the hardest hit and most remote areas in Northern Cebu, Leyte, Eastern Samar, Bantayan and Kalibo. Salesian Missions and Don Bosco Direct are working with families who lost their homes to build typhoon-resistant housing, have started a training Center for Disaster Education Preparedness, and are spearheading a Fishing Boat Livelihood project to help bring back the fishing industry.

The donation provided close to a million servings of pink salmon and will reach more than a hundred thousand people. We saw firsthand the effect of the donation within the reconstruction efforts. We met people from many sectors of the economy who were affected, including coconut and sugar cane growers, tricycle drivers (local taxis) and all types of merchants. People still reeling from the typhoon seemed genuinely touched by the generosity of Alaskans. As word got out that that Don Bosco was providing Alaska canned salmon, locals were motivated to seek out the distribution centers to get their taste of Alaska salmon along with other available assistance. Canned salmon is ideal for humanitarian efforts; people appreciated that it required no fuel or water to prepare and was easy to incorporate in local dishes.

When we participated in distributions, Povelite connected with local fishermen. After meeting one recipient, she commented, "Standing there tattooed and smoking a cigarette and smiling in front of his boat, the fisherman we encountered reminded me of many fishermen I've known in Alaska."

As Povelite works in Alaska for the season's salmon harvest, she will no doubt share her experience of how Alaskan pink salmon has reached across the globe and strengthened the bond between fishing families in two countries.

To learn more about the fishermen of Leyte and Povelite's experiences, check out <http://salmon-berry.blogspot.com>. NF



Natalia Povelite distributes canned pink Alaska salmon to members of a stricken community in the Philippines.

Global Food Aid Program. This is the state of Alaska's initiative to support Alaska seafood in all nutrition and food-assistance programs and humanitarian

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