

## “BUILD AND THEY SHALL COME”

Some of you may still remember that old and well loved sentimental movie produced in 1989, “Field of Dreams”, which starred Kevin Costner. In that movie, Costner played the character of a corn farmer who heard voices in his dream saying, “If you build it, they will come.” So after convincing his wife, he converted his cornfield into a baseball field despite the taunts and suspicion of his neighbors that the couple had become nuts. Of course, “Field of Dreams” was a sports fantasy movie where Costner’s baseball field attracted the legends of the game, the greatest baseball players who had lived and had long died and they all appeared and played baseball in his field. And hundreds and thousands of people came to watch the game. His “field of dreams”: was a rousing success to think that it all started with a dream telling him, “Build and they shall come.”

That dream was played out in reality right here in Iloilo City when a fledgling non-life insurance company, Stronghold Insurance put up its sales office, a business development office in 2009 in the then remote and sparsely populated district of Manduarriao. That office made up of 4 shipping container vans modified and fitted out to serve as our office stood in a small borrowed lot, originally 90 sq. meters but expanded later on to more than 3,000sqm, lent to us free of charge by Engr. Felix Gurrea, as our business grew. It’s just across the street, just a stone throw away from where we are gathered now. That was our “field of dreams”. And that visionary corn farmer was personified by our founder who worked hard to build Stronghold into what it is now today. Mr. David Mercado, our founding president who is now our Chairman Emeritus, is not with us today but he is the foundation of this edifice. The members of the Board of Directors, many of whom are present tonight, and the Management led by President and Gen. Manager Mr. Romulo de los Reyes, are the pillars of this building. This Western Visayas Business Center of Stronghold Insurance is a testament to what the great American entrepreneur, Walt Disney, had once said: “All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them.” For the past 62 years of our existence, Strongholders, despite some setbacks, have followed and chased their wildest dreams. Today, I’m proud to say, we are living our dreams. But that is not the end of our journey. We would not be enjoying the comfort and amenities of this brand new building without the hospitality and support of the generous Ilonggos and the residents of Western Visayas. We commit to serve the people of this region up to our level’s best. Iloilo City has been our home and Stronghold is here to stay. We, Strongholders, shall make Iloilo the stronghold of Stronghold Insurance. God bless your progressive government leaders and your wonderful people. Long live Stronghold Insurance. A pleasant good evening to all.

Officially, that’s the end of my talk but let me digress a bit. Stronghold is not about money. We are more than the profit we make. We are after service. Our present advocacy is to expand our poor people’s access to insurance services. Last month, Stronghold in a letter signed by PGM Romulo de los Reyes urged Senate President Migz Zubiri and Speaker Martin Ferdinand Romualdez to abolish the taxes on Microinsurance. MI as you very well know are designed to make insurance protection affordable to the poor. Right now, non-life MI policies

are taxed between 25% - 27% broken down into: 12% VAT, 123.5% DST, 0.05% LGU tax and 2% Fire Services Tax if the product purchased is fire insurance. If we remove the taxes on MI we will make MI less expensive and within the reach of low-salaried workers who could hardly afford to put food on their table, secure shelter over their heads and provide clothing on their back. By extending them MI coverage, Strosnghold and all insurers will be giving more social protection to the marginalized sector of our population. This will go a long way since the government has finite resources to provide them adequate social protection. As reported not too long ago, the government 4POs program, despite its huge outlay, has failed to lift 90% of our people from poverty. This is our way of helping our masses. It's true that we Strosngholders make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.