

Special Feature

Editor's Note: The Governor's Council of Economic Advisers' Public Private Partnership initiative has drawn widespread support from the community. Various activities have been conducted and projects have been launched to rally behind the destination enhancement campaign. This section will provide insights on how PPP supporters are committed to the program.



5 groups work to enhance the Grotto

Five groups have teamed up for one common goal: to spruce up the Grotto. Bibong Corp., Loco & Taco Dining Bar, Divewish, Tasi & the Ali's, and International Roller Skates recently joined the Public Private Partnership campaign of the Governor's Council of Economic Advisers and chose to adopt the Grotto.

Named as one of world's best dive sites by Marine Diving magazine, the Grotto is popular with both tourists and residents because of its crystal-clear blue waters, rich marine life, and a series of underwater tunnels leading to the open ocean. In peak season, between 700 and 1,000 visitors go to the Grotto. Unfortunately, they also leave trash at the site and its surrounding areas. Facilities at the site have also been worn out by the

volume of its visitors and frequency of their visits, coupled with the lack of

proper maintenance.

These concerns were raised in past several years in a call to protect one of the most treasured sites of the islands and the five new groups involved in GCEA's destination enhancement initiative want to do their part in keeping the Grotto clean and safe for people to continue to enjoy the beauty of the collapsed underwater cavern.

"As residents of the CNMI, we care about [the] Grotto and the entire islands. The Grotto is a great place for diving and a lot of people are in awe with its natural and unique beauty," said International Roller Skates general manager Doyi Kim.

Less than a month after signing up with the PPP initiative, the five groups have twice done cleanup drives at their adopted site and did minor improvement works.

Last month, 32 volunteers from the five groups did a cleanup drive at the Grotto and its surroundings. The two pavilions were repainted, along with the railings on the stairs leading



Volunteers repaint one of the pavilions at the Grotto.

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down to the Grotto, while the parking area was cleared of overgrown bushes. The groups also identified other improvement projects needed at the site, including replacing the ashtrays made from used drums and some plastic materials.

Two weeks after their first cleanup, volunteers from the five groups returned to the Grotto and built concrete ashtrays.

Bibong Corp., Loco & Taco Dining Bar, Divewish, Tasi & the Ali's, and International Roller Skates will continue with the repainting jobs and cleanup in the coming months. They are also looking into fixing the

restroom, putting up lookout/picnic tables and tents, and cleaning up the curbs and filling potholes in the parking area. Putting up directional/instructional and safety signages are also being planned to organize people lining up to head down the Grotto.

"This is the best time [when no visitors are allowed to come] to work on improving our tour sites. When we welcome tourists back, they will definitely see changes at [the] Grotto. We are honored to be on board the PPP program and excited to see the enhancements in the different sites," Loco & Taco Dining Bar general manager and owner Mickey Kim said. (PR)



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A worker spreads cement to the first batch of concrete ashtrays that will replace the ones made from plastic materials.



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The five groups that will take care of the Grotto show a sample of concrete ashtrays and benches they are planning to build at the site.



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A volunteer bush cuts the ground at the Grotto during a clean-up drive last month.