

PANDEMIC TESTS QC, CAMANAVA EXECS

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THE leadership of the local chief executives in Camanava (Caloocan–Malabon–Navotas–Valenzuela) and Quezon City were greatly challenged by the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic that ravaged the world in 2020.

Mayors Oscar Malapitan (Caloocan), Antolin Oreta 3rd (Malabon), Tobias Tiangco (Navotas), Rex Gatchalian (Valenzuela) and **Josefina Belmonte** (Quezon City), were focused on implementing programs and projects under their approved annual budget. But all that changed when Covid-19 struck, which forced them to realign funds to respond to the health crisis.

With the full support of the Caloocan City council, led by its presiding officer Vice Mayor Macario Asistio 3rd, Malapitan set aside P500 million as cash assistance to all residents “with no exemption” since the national government’s Social Amelioration Package could only benefit less than half of his constituents.

Malapitan also made sure that the 14, 000 students of the University of Caloocan City, and 268,000 kindergarten and senior high school students in public schools would receive cash aid amounting to P149 million from the local government.

Meanwhile, Oreta partnered with Rep. Jaye Lacson–Noel and members of the city council to ensure that regular food rations, medicines and face masks were delivered to constituents who were forced to stay home.

Lacson–Noel forged an agreement with the Department of Labor and Employment to provide thousands of jobless residents temporary employment through the Tulong Pang-hanapbuhay sa ating Disadvantaged/ Displaced Workers.

Camanava and Quezon City rolled out mobile markets like the Market on Wheels in Valenzuela, which partnered with local cooperatives, and Navotas’ Kadiwa on Wheels, which brought basic goods at affordable prices to residents.

“With this, we were also able to help our farmers who could not sell their produce due to the Covid-19 lockdowns, especially all over Luzon,” Belmonte and Tiangco said.

As the number of Covid-19 cases rose, the mayors set up isolation or quarantine facilities, with the help of the Department of Public Works and Highways.

Tiangco utilized 50 40-foot container vans as isolation facilities at the Navotas Centennial Park, while Gatchalian set up the city’s Hope Molecular Laboratory where samples taken from swab tests were processed.

“This worked simultaneously with our expanded contract tracing and this gave us control over our testing efforts,” Gatchalian said.

The Department of the Interior and Local Government and the Department of Information and Communications Technology presented Gatchalian the Best in Covid-19 Pandemic Response and Business Empowerment Award during the Digital Governance Awards 2020.

The mayors made sure all safety and health protocols imposed by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases, like wearing of face masks and face shields, as well as physical distancing, were implemented.

They also passed a number of ordinances such as liquor bans, curfews and prevention of discrimination against health workers and curfews.

The pandemic also changed the educational system, which forced the Department of Education to shift to “blended learning” as face-to-face classes were prohibited.

In Quezon City, Belmonte distributed to public high school students some 176, 000 tablets worth P1.2 billion and 3, 210 laptops for teachers.

Bringing the “classroom feel” to a whole new level, Gatchalian introduced the new normal way of learning with Valenzuela Live Online Streaming School.

The cities of Quezon and Valenzuela adopted the use of quick response codes in contact tracing.

With the promise of a Covid-19 vaccine soon, Camanava and Quezon City have formed their respective plans and task forces to ensure the expeditious and orderly acquisition and distribution of vaccines.

“We are organizing early to ensure that the directions set by the national government will be followed and that those who need the virus most are prioritized,” the mayors said.