

The Joy Belmonte brand of leadership

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Last of two parts

SHE is a leader. While listening to the state of the city address last October 21, and amid the search for new leaders for this country, I couldn't help but dream that a Joy Belmonte brand of leadership could be seen in national magnitude. She is running for a last term as mayor literally unopposed.

Mayor Joy is recognized by the United Nations Environment Program and is now listed as one of the 50 Sustainability Leaders by Forbes magazine. She leads Quezon City as one of the 119 A-list Cities.

In last week's column, I highlighted the excellent fiscal management for maintaining QC as a debt-free city, without having to increase any taxes. QC has been cleared with unqualified opinion by the Commission on Audit for four consecutive years and was ranked first by the Department of Finance among Highly Urbanized Cities in terms of year-on-year growth with a 30-percent increase between fiscal years 2022 and 2023.

She leads with technology as a tool to connect service to QC citizens and simplifying processes with it. QC has the centralized Helpline 122 for any disaster or emergency, including violence against women and children, and online sexual abuse and exploitation of children, mental health concerns and emergencies, and gambling addiction and related harm. She is building a businessfriendly city receiving a Most Business Friendly Local Government Award from the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry for two years in a row, 2023 and 2024. The city is a four-time Overall Most Competitive Local Government Unit (LGU) awardee of the Department of Trade and Industry.

QC has become the Innovation and Startup Capital through the StartUP QC program — the first and the largest of its kind in the country — and Pangkabuhayan QC. The city recognizes the role of sari-sari store owners and other nano-entrepreneurs in the economy and has made them legitimate business owners.

Of the P39 billion approved budget in 2024, more than half was allocated for social services: health, education, livelihood, housing and disaster preparedness. This has been consistent through the years as she prioritizes the quality of life of the people.

To continue, here's more about how a Joy Belmonte brand of leadership is benefiting its QCitizens and how she is creating a template for local governments to follow.

Making citizens healthy

There are more QCitizens registered in PhilHealth, as the city is now a universal health care-integrated site. There is an integrated health information system. This enables the use of only one database for patient records.

There is a doctor in every two facilities, and 79 doctors assigned to 66 health centers.

There are free maintenance medicines for hypertension and diabetes patients. Some 156,000 were recipients of free medicines, with 43 percent of beneficiaries being non-seniors.

The **QC Human Milk Bank** is also a finalist in the Galing Pook Awards.

QC has Integrated Cancer Control ordinance, under which more than 56,000 women have undergone breast cancer screening and 14,000 for cervical cancer screening. Proper referrals were made. Klinika Eastwood, the first publicprivate partnership, conducted more than 900 HIV testings.

She champions better mental health support in the city. The Health Code has been in place since 2022 and recognized as a Hall of Famer in the Light Up Blue Campaign of the Philippine Mental Health Association.

In total, the **Quezon City government** has opened around 210.52 kilometers of bike lanes in the city — which is 60 percent of its goal of 350 kilometers. There are 93 new park infrastructure projects and 14 new parks with landscaping and person with disability (PWD)-friendly pathways.

Educating for the future

Education is a top priority in line with the goal to build a future-ready city. The city has a strong scholarship program with more than 31,000 scholars; more than 11,000 have graduated since it was started.

More than 2 million learning kits and 300,000 tablets have been distributed to learners and 10,000 laptops to teachers. The public schools in the city have 695 high-speed internet lines.

The **Quezon City University** is recognized in the 2024 Times Higher Education Impact Rankings — the only local university — in its effort for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

QC is reinforcing its commitment to elevate literacy and numeracy through the QC tutoring program. The goal is zero illiteracy and non-numerates in the city.

She set the vision for zero child labor with the Anti-Child Labor Ordinance.

She houses families

She promised and delivered dignity in the settlement and housing of 27,887 families within just five years. The city has bought more than 2,669 condominium units at Urban Deca Homes in Commonwealth, as well as an additional 51,712 square meters of land. Two hundred sixty-five families were relocated from the danger zones to resettlement sites of the National Housing Authority in 2024.

Inclusivity where no one is left behind

For a more inclusive user experience, the QC government website — the first PWD-friendly LGU website in the country — has text-to-speech functions and other accessibility tools.

There are programs for productive persons deprived of liberty with livelihood programs and BS Entrepreneurship under the Quezon City University, as well as assistance to solo parents, wives of drug dependents and survivors of gender-based violence.

The waste pickers are now called resource collectors, with training in Tesda (Technical Education and Skills Development Authority) and financial assistance, and are all registered with SSS, PhilHealth and Pag-IBIG.

With a decade of Gender Fair Ordinance, QC hosted the biggest Pride Festival in Southeast Asia — with over 200,000 gathering in the city this year to advocate for equality and freedom.

Sustainability like no other

The city continues to be recognized for its environment and sustainability efforts.

Under the Trash to Cashback program, residents can trade their recyclable waste for “environmental points” — which they can use to pay for utilities and grocery items. The “Kuha sa Tingi” program seeks to curb the use of single-use plastics or sachets and has now eliminated the equivalent of 100 kilometers of sachets.

QC has 31 biodigesters and 224 rainwater harvesting systems.

There are more than 25,000 urban farmers in QC, with more than a thousand urban farms across the city, capable of producing 44,000 kilos of fruits and vegetables for thousands of families. She is leading to plant 1 million trees.

City like no other

Solar energy in public facilities save the city an estimated P1.5 million every year. The city has a drainage master plan with holistic and data-based solutions for flood control worth P123 billion.

There is a Project Aurora centralized CCTV network, additional 1,355 streetlights to add to the 4,000 since 2019, and electric buses for safe and free transportation.

Mayor Joy Belmonte’s kind of leadership is what we need. She has a vision of the future, a concrete plan to execute and the courage to bring change. She gives so much hope to the Philippines with her kind of leadership as a local executive.

QC being the biggest city, occupies the territorial jurisdiction of 171.71 square kilometers, or 17,171 hectares, which accounts for one-fourth of the entire National Capital Region. It has a population of 3,137,062, making it the most populous city in the Philippines, not including a visiting population which moves to the city for reasons of education, work, government transaction or entertainment.

One thing is sure. This lady mayor does it well.