

FILIPINO TIES

A PUBLICATION OF THE COMMISSION ON FILIPINOS OVERSEAS DISTRIBUTED WORLDWIDE February - July 2006 Vol. XIII No. 2

PGMA issues Executive Order to assist NCLEX testing in RP



Face Off: (Photo at left), Officers from the Philippine Nurses Association of America (PNAA); Philippine Nurses Association (PNA) and the Association of Deans of Philippine Colleges of Nursing (ADPCN) argue the need for NCLEX testing in the Philippines. At right photo, (partly hidden) Executive Director Jose Molano, Jr., NCSBN Executive Director Kathy Apple, NCSBN President Donna Dorsey, CFO Chairman Dante Ang, NCSBN Associate Director Casey Marks and Pearson-VUE Director for Asia-Pacific Fraser Cargill weigh the pros and cons of NCLEX testing in the Philippines during a dialogue with stakeholders at the New World Hotel in March 2006 Photos: CFO

In an unprecedented move, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo issued Executive Order No. 550 on 31 July 2006, creating a Presidential Task Force on the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) in support of lobby efforts to bring NCLEX testing in the Philippines. Hoping to address intellectual property and security concerns arising from the conduct of the NCLEX in the Philippines, the task force is chaired by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO), with the Intellectual Property Office, Professional Regulation Commission, Philippine National Police

and Philippine Nurses Association as members.

A year after CFO launched the lobby efforts to bring the National Council Licensure Examination for Nurses (NCLEX) to the Philippines, officials of the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN), headed by its Board President, Ms. Donna Dorsey, visited the country on 23 to 24 March 2006 to assess the feasibility of establishing an NCLEX international test center in the country. Ms.

See PGMA issues, page 10

CFO devolves mandatory guidance and counseling program to PRISM

Effective 2 May 2006, the People's Reform Initiative for Social Mobilization (PRISM) has been authorized to implement the mandatory CFO Guidance and Counseling Program. Pursuant to Department of Foreign Affairs' Department Orders Nos. 11-97, 28-94 and 15-89, the said program is required for Filipinos who are leaving the country as spouses or other partners of foreign nationals.

PRISM is located at Equitable-PCI Bank Building along Taft Avenue and is easily accessible from the CFO, National Bureau of Investigation, Department of Foreign Affairs and foreign embassies. PRISM may be contacted at telephone numbers (02) 5253114 or 5253783.

PRISM is the second of two service providers authorized by the CFO to

See CFO devolves, page 10

Philippine schools overseas hold fifth conference in Xiamen, China

Forty five participants representing 25 Philippine schools abroad travelled to Xiamen, China to attend the Fifth Conference of Philippine Schools Overseas held at the Crowne Plaza Harbourview Hotel from April 21 to 22, 2006. Participants, mostly school administrators, trustees, principals, and teachers in both elementary and secondary levels in various schools abroad, joined in the two-day conference workshop organized by the Inter-Agency Committee on Philippine Schools Overseas (IACPSO). A team from the Mapua Institute of Technology (MIT) also attended the

See Philippine Schools, page 11



Forty five participants from 25 Philippine Schools Overseas pose with members of the IACPSO as they gather in Xiamen, China for the Fifth PSO Conference.

Pursuant to CFO Board Resolution No. 2006-02, CFO fees are increased effective 01 August 2006 as follows:

Registration Fee	- PhP 400.00
Replacement of lost Guidance and Counseling Certificate	- PhP 800.00

News From Abroad

SMITHSONIAN FEATURES EXHIBIT ON FILIPINO IMMIGRATION TO THE US

WASHINGTON, DC - Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum complex, opened an exhibit tracing 100 years of Filipino immigration to the US on 17 May 2006. The exhibit, "*Singgalot, Ties That Bind*", consists of images on large wooden panels that tell of the struggles and triumphs of Filipinos. It is on display at the S. Dillon Ripley Center Concourse until August 20. It then travels to key cities for three years, according to exhibit curator Dean Alegado.

Alegado, a University of Hawaii professor, said in a February forum that Filipinos have a proud history in the US. Experiencing discrimination and unfair labor practices, Filipino plantation workers in Hawaii and California forged alliances with Mexicans and started a labor movement. Today, in coalition with other Asian Americans, they are strong advocates of comprehensive immigration reform with a fast-tracked family reunification feature. They also lobby for Filipino World War II veterans' benefits.

The 30 sepia-like panels, 4 feet by 8 feet high with mounted black and white photos, illustrate the stories of Filipino crews in the Spanish galleons who jumped ship and settled in Louisiana. They also depict the first wave of immigrants (farm workers in Hawaii who came in 1906), the second wave (those who served in World War II, their spouses and children), and the third wave of doctors, nurses and other professionals who came after the liberalized immigration law of 1965.

Philippine Ambassador to the US Albert del Rosario and Loida Nicolas-Lewis, national president of the National Federation of Filipino American Associations, paid tribute to the pioneer immigrants and encouraged Filipinos all over the US to visit the exhibit. Representatives Mike Honda and Ed Casey, the two lawmakers representing California and Hawaii, two states with the largest Filipino American presence, were also present during the launching of the exhibit.

Source: *Malaya Philippine News Daily*

FILIPINOS MAKE THEIR VOICES HEARD ON U.S. IMMIGRATION DEBATE

NEW YORK - Filipinos are making sure their voices are heard in the deafening outcry against House Bill 4437, also known as the Border Protection bill in the US Congress. The bill proposes severe punishment against undocumented immigrants and U.S. entities that give shelter to them, or employ them.

In New York, Filipinos are joining protest marches urging the ranks of undocumented immigrants to "stay vigilant." A noise barrage organized by the advocacy group the Philippine Forum, was held to mobilize Filipinos for immigrants' protection. The Justice 4 Immigrants Filipino Coalition, comprised of Filipino organizations and concerned individuals, sponsored a "*Pagtitipon para sa legalisasyon*," an open community gathering advocating 'YES' to legalization, swift family reunification, and 'NO' to deportation and criminalization of undocumented persons.

Filipino families, business owners, and community members blew horns, banged utensils and made loud noises that echoed along Roosevelt Avenue to voice out their protests over a House bill that would make illegal immigration a felony.

Meanwhile, the Senate Judiciary Committee voted in April to legalize some 12 million immigrants and provide them with *U.S. citizenship*. This means that illegal immigrants must hold jobs, pass criminal background checks, learn English, pay fines and taxes, and fall in line to wait for about 11 years to earn citizenship. However, whatever bill that comes out of the Senate would still be reconciled with H. R. 4437, which calls for stronger efforts for immigration reform from Filipino communities across the U.S.

Source: *Philippine News*

PHILIPPINE EMBASSY, FILIPINO COMMUNITY AND BRITISH HOME OFFICE MEET ON NEW UK IMMIGRATION POLICY

LONDON - Philippine Ambassador to the United Kingdom Edgardo B. Espiritu, Embassy officials and sectoral representatives of the Filipino community in the UK recently held a dialogue with officials of the British Home Office, UK's department responsible for immigration, justice and national security, to discuss the implications of the UK's proposed new immigration policy on Filipino migrant workers.

The UK's new immigration policy uses a points-based system involving a five-tier or category framework. These are: tier 1, highly skilled individuals who can contribute to the UK's growth and productivity; tier 2, skilled workers with a job offer who can fill gaps in the UK labor force; tier 3, limited numbers of low-skilled workers needed to fill specific temporary labor shortages; tier 4, students; and tier 5, youth mobility and temporary workers, or people allowed to work in the UK for a limited period of time to satisfy primarily non-economic objectives.

The Philippine panel put forward the case for highly-skilled and skilled Filipino workers, including domestic helpers who play an important socio-economic role in Britain, as well as Filipino nurses who have recently been hired in large numbers by the National Health Service (NHS) as a response to a critical gap in the NHS. The Philippine panel stressed on the positive attributes of Filipino migrant workers in the UK, such as educational qualifications, professional skills, the responsible and caring attitude of domestic workers and health professionals, and the Filipino workers' proficiency in the English language.

Source: *DFA*

Bush Honors Filipina in Asian-Pacific Heritage Month Rites

Virginia Ganzon Sturwold, an 81 year-old Filipino American received the President's Volunteer Service Award - *"the highest honor given in recognition of those who have contributed their time and their talents to those in need"* - from President George W. Bush on May 12, 2006, as part of the White House celebration of Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month.

Sturwold, a retired teacher and editor, has a survivor's instinct and determination. Born in the Philippines, she lived through the Bataan Death March, breast cancer, and domestic violence. Despite, or perhaps because of these challenges, her sense of humor, positive outlook, and strong desire to help others in similar situations have spurred her toward a lifelong pursuit of volunteer work and service.

Sturwold, an active member of Experience Corps (a volunteer organization in the US) went regularly to Francis Scott Key Elementary School in San Francisco to work one-on-one with children struggling to learn to read. Logging in more than 500 hours of tutoring and reaching out especially to immigrant children who speak Tagalog, Sturwold, a native of the Philippines, also teaches knitting to boys and girls after school. More than a scarf-making endeavor, the activity contributes to a safe environment, confidence, and a mentoring relationship that studies show is key to student success.

"Success to me isn't just helping the children learn to read at grade level," Sturwold says. "Success is also nurturing the students' eagerness to come to school and seeing them excited about learning for the first time."

Outside the school setting, Sturwold has a long history of volunteer service with the American Cancer Society and with organizations that help battered women.

In presenting the President's Volunteer Service award, Bush told Sturwold and four others selected for the honor that they *"have served our nation in distinct ways and in so doing have made America a better place to live."*

Source: www.experiencecorps.org



Above, Filipino-American Virginia Ganzon Sturwold and President George W. Bush during the award ceremonies at the White House on 12 May. Photo: www.whitehouse.gov

FILIPINO PEACEKEEPER HONORED IN UN RITES

NEW YORK - The United Nations (UN) feted on 31 May 2006, along with 123 other fallen international peacekeepers, Army Staff Sergeant Antonio Batomalaque, who was killed in action in Haiti last year.

The UN Philippine Mission said Secretary General Kofi Annan, in solemn ceremonies commemorating the International Day of UN Peacekeepers at the UN Headquarters, paid tribute to Batomalaque and his peers from 46 countries who died in the line of duty.

Ambassador Lauro Baja, Jr., Permanent Representative to the UN, received from Undersecretary General for Peacekeeping Jean Marie Guehenno, the Dag Hammarskjold Medal in the Service of Peace for Batomalaque's family.

A member of the elite Scout Rangers, Batomalaque became the first combat casualty for the Philippines in a UN operation after he was shot and killed by gunmen who attacked UN peacekeepers in the volatile slum district of Cite Soleil in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince on April 14, 2005. Accounts say that the slain Filipino peacekeeper was shot and killed while providing cover for a ranking United States Army officer who was also

serving with the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). His gallant action saved the life of the American officer and he was cited posthumously by the US Army in the process.

The Philippines has a contingent of 560 military and police personnel serving in UN peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan, Burundi, Cote D'Ivoire, Haiti, Kosovo, Liberia, Sudan and Timor Leste, making the Philippines the 24th largest contributor to UN peacekeeping missions and the largest in Southeast Asia.

"The medals we bestow today on our fallen comrades can do little to replace their presence, their good deeds, their knowledge and bonhomie, the love they showered on family and friends, but they do place on record our everlasting gratitude for the contributions these UN heroes made to our global mission of peace", UN Chief Kofi Annan said during the ceremonies.

Source: www.tinfishpress.com





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Quotes from the Quill

"Hindi ko po sigurado.

Tama ba namang nagpakasal ka, tapos iiwan din siya?"

--- young child of an OFW featured in the documentary *Bayani ba ang Nanay Ko?*, on the question *Would you go abroad when you already have a family of your own?*

"The old world is dying, but a new world is being born... The old world will die so that the new world will be born with less sacrifice and agony for the living."

--- Carlos Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart*, 1973, p. 189

2005 Stock Estimate: Tracking the global Filipino in numbers

For the first time since the annual stock estimation of overseas Filipinos began in 1994, the 2005 stock estimate of overseas Filipinos manifested a 2% decrease from 8,083,848 in 2004 to 7,924,188 in 2005. The latest stock estimate of overseas Filipinos is based on the aggregation of data from the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, Department of Foreign Affairs, Philippine Embassies and Consulates, and the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration.



Based on the 2005 stock estimate, there are 3,391,338 (43%) permanent Filipino residents or those who are holders of immigrant visa and whose stay do not depend on work contracts; 3,651,727 (46%) temporary Filipino residents or those whose stay overseas is dependent on the duration of their employment and who are expected to return to the Philippines at the end of their contracts; and 881,123 (11%) irregular Filipino migrants or those who have no valid residence or work permits and are illegally overstaying in a foreign country.

Permanent Residents

There is a 6.4% increase in the number of Filipinos granted permanent residency status across Africa, East and South Asia, West Asia, Europe, Americas and Oceania. The United States continues to be the primary destination country where a large number of Filipino immigrants (2,326,675) permanently reside. Canada ranked second while Australia ranked third. Switzerland registered the biggest increase in the number of Filipino permanent residents with a 779% increase from 2004 figures of 922 to 8,107 in 2005. Next to Equatorial Guinea with no records for permanent residents, Palau holds the lowest number of Filipino permanent residents all over the world at 5.

Temporary Residents

OFW deployment across all six regions increased slightly by 1.48% with Saudi Arabia as the top destination country among OFWs. United Arab Emirates ranked second with a 93% increase in the number of OFW deployment for 2005. Hongkong and Japan ranked third and fourth respectively with both countries registering a decrease in the number of OFW deployment by 14% and 41% respectively from its 2004 figures. 247,707 or 6% of all OFWs are seabased workers.

Irregular migrants

2005 also saw the marked decrease in the number of Filipino irregular migrants or TNTs from 1,297,005 in 2004 to 881,123 in 2005 or a 32% decrease in estimates from Philippine posts overseas. Malaysia registered a 58.3% decrease in Filipino irregular migrants since stricter immigration rules were implemented in mid 2005. Italy on the other hand showed a 349% increase in the number of Filipino permanent residents because of its amnesty program for illegal migrants but nonetheless registered a 58.3% increase in the number of its irregular migrants.

Whether permanent, temporary or irregular, overseas Filipinos have contributed greatly to the Philippine economy with remittances through formal banking channels recorded at USD 10.6 million for the year 2005 alone, proof that wherever the global Filipino is, home will always be where the heart is.



Mailbox

Worthwhile experiences in the US

I came to the United States as the fiancée of an American national. After three (3) months, my fiancé and I had a simple yet elegant wedding. I am now blessed to have a very kind husband and generous in-laws.

I have a good life here. I have lots of opportunities both at work and in school. I work with little children at St. Paul's Child Care Center. I am also a part time certified nursing assistant at a retirement home near our house. Later, I will be working full time at the retirement home. As a nursing graduate in the Philippines, I inquired about the requirements for me to be a certified nurse here. I was advised to submit my transcript of records for evaluation. Since it has been ten (10) years since I graduated from a nursing school in the Philippines, I was required to take up additional nursing subjects in accordance with the curriculum here. College education here is more expensive than in the Philippines. That's why I decided to apply for a student loan to finance my studies.

With my stay here, I make sure that I have sufficient income for all my expenses. I do not just rely on my husband for my expenses because I do not want to be a burden to him. I also opened a Savings and Checking Accounts in my name. I want to make sure that my hard earned income is well kept.

In my 15 months of stay here, *masaya ako at marami na akong nagawa. Naniniwala ako na kaya maayos ang buhay ko dito ay dahil malinis ang hangarin ko sa pagpapakasal sa asawa kong foreigner. Maayos din ang komunikasyon namin ng aking asawa. Pinag-uusapan naming mabuti ang anumang desisyong ginagawa ko, lalo na pagdating sa pera.*

I hope my story here will serve as inspiration to others, especially to those who plan to permanently reside here or marry an American national.

EVANGELINE BERNARDO-HALL
610 Yahima St., Washington
United States of America

Would be doctor sends his gratitude

I am Rommel Idmilao Sales, UP College of Medicine Class 2007, a medical intern at the UP-PGH, and the recipient of the Philippine Medical Foundation Scholarship Fund for four years now.

I really cannot imagine how far I have gone. Only a year left plus the medical board exams, then I am a licensed physician. Four years ago, my parents were bothered on how they would be able to send me to medical school because of financial difficulties. Now, I am called Dr. Sales by my patients, I am not required to pay any tuition fee, I am getting free meals from the dietary department of PGH, and is being trained by the best physicians in the country.

I could have not reached this stage of my life if not because of your kind hearts, your generosity. I hope and I pray that you will be showered with more blessings and more kindness. Again, let me say thank you.

With only one year left in medical school and the board exams to look forward to, I have no choice but to think of my next plan of action. Although I have not made my final decision, I am thinking of entering a residency program for further training and specialization, probably in the field of surgery or obstetrics and gynecology, or any surgical field. And once I have established a good practice, I will go back to my province and serve my fellow Isabelinos.

I hope that in the future, I will have the chance to thank you personally. Maraming salamat po! May God bless you all the time.

ROMMEL IDMILAO SALES
UP College of Medicine 2007

Editor's Note: Mr. Sales is a scholar of the Philippine Medical Foundation based in Virginia, USA.

E-mail system for more efficient communication

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the people of CFO who were involved in the speedy processing of my request for waiver of the two-year residency requirement and therefore, the granting of the No Objection Statement. I also want to praise your office's use of the email system as a means of communicating to Filipinos abroad. It definitely helps cut down the processing time, especially in cases such as mine where time is of the essence.

Again, thank you for your assistance.

ANGELICA ESGUERRA
EVP Participant

Appreciation for book donations

In behalf of the people of Barangay Santiago, Santo Tomas, Batangas, we would like to express our deepest appreciation and heartfelt thanks to you for donating various kinds of books to our barangay. May your office continue its mission and work of righteousness.

Thank you and God bless.

ARTHUR M. MARASIGAN
Barangay Captain

The FILIPINO TIES welcomes your opinions, comments, and suggestions. You can write to us at the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 1345 Quirino Ave., cor. South Superhighway, Manila, Philippines, send us a fax at (632) 561-8332, or e-mail us at cfodfa@info.com.ph.



CFO and CMA hold Round Table Discussion on Filipino-Australian Marriages

The Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO), in cooperation with the Center for Migrant Advocacy (CMA) conducted the "Round Table Discussion on Filipino Women in Inter-Cultural Relationships: The Case of Filipino-Australian Marriages" (RTD) on June 14, 2006 at the Heritage Hotel in Pasay City.

The RTD was convened to facilitate sharing of information and consensus-building on concerns arising from Filipino-Australian marriages or partnerships among agencies involved in assisting Filipinos overseas in distress.

From 1989 to 2005, the CFO registered 23,532 Filipinos who are spouses or partners of Australian nationals. On the other hand, the Australian Embassy in Manila accepts some 1,000 spouse visa applications, and 500 fiancée visa applications every year. The registered population of Filipino-Australian couples accounts for the third largest grouping of Filipinos in inter-cultural marriages or partnerships.

Both the CFO and the Australian Embassy reported that Filipino-Australian marriages or partnerships are generally genuine and

successful notwithstanding settlement adjustments involving culture and language, climate and employment. A small percentage, however, experience domestic violence and there are isolated cases of tragedy.

The Australian Embassy conducts screening interviews for spouse or fiancée visa applicants to ensure that the relationship concerned is genuine. The CFO on the other hand, implements a guidance and counseling program to ensure that Filipino spouses and other partners of Australian nationals have the minimum preparation to meet the challenges of an inter-cultural marriage in particular, and settlement overseas in general.

At the end of the RTD, it was recommended that pre-departure services such as the guidance and counseling program of the CFO, as well as post-arrival services and linkages with support organizations overseas be strengthened. Information sharing among agencies that look after the interests of Filipinos in Australia should also be encouraged to enable these agencies to come up with efficient individual or joint mechanisms to address the concerns of Filipinos in Australia.

Resource persons invited to provide inputs to the RTD were CFO Deputy Executive Director Jennifer O. Gonzales; Principal Migration Officer of Department of Immigration and Multi-Cultural and Indigenous Affairs Peta Dunn; Post-doctoral Fellow of the Australian National University Dr. Nicki Saroca; and Ms. Estrella C. Masigan. CMA Executive Director Ellene Sana moderated the RTD while CMA Chairman Noel Esquela consolidated the issues and concerns, and recommendations arising from the discussion.

CEP 2006 launched in 6 Regions

The Commission on Filipinos Overseas conducted the first leg of its annual Community Education Program (CEP) entitled *Handa ka na bang mag-abroad? Ano ang mga dapat alamin?* from June 26 to July 28, 2006 in Regions X, I, III, IV-A, III and Caraga respectively covering the provinces of Lanao del Norte, Misamis Oriental, Bukidnon, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Laguna, Batangas, Agusan del Norte, Surigao del Sur, Pampanga and Tarlac.

CFO Officers were joined by representatives from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, Overseas Workers Welfare Administration and the Philippine Information Agency in this inter-agency endeavor which seeks to raise public awareness on various issues concerning migration, intermarriages and existing government policies and programs directed against human trafficking, illegal recruitment and documentation fraud, among others.

Activities such as meetings and dialogues with non-government and government organizations, religious leaders/members, press briefing and radio interviews were conducted by the CEP team.

Approximately 8,000 participants participated in the CEP activities conducted in the said areas. The information campaign activities are scheduled in 4 other regions including the Zamboanga Peninsula, Central and Western Visayas, and the Bicol Region until September this year.



Top: Mayor Jun Chipeco of Calamba, Laguna learn the realities of migration together with Calamba City's barangay captains and SK leaders. Bottom: Barangay captains from Batangas City rethink their roles in the migration process during the pulong-pulong session with Batangas City officials.

Lakbay Aral '06:

Thirty three participants from California, USA attended this year's *Lakbay-Aral* Program. From 18 July – 01 August 2006, the participants visited various places in Manila, Quezon Province, Bataan, Cagayan De Oro City, Camiguin Island, Davao City, and Samal Island to learn more about Philippine culture, language, and its people.

During the first four days, the participants visited the Office of the Manila City Mayor, toured Intramuros, visited the National Museum and Malacañan Museum, and learned some Philippine dances at the Philippine Women's University. They attended a lecture on Philippine history and culture conducted by Professor Bernard Karganilla of the University of the Philippines – Manila, and also learned basic conversational Filipino from Ms. Sining Lumbera of the University of the Philippines – Diliman. On the fifth day, the participants lazed around Villa Escudero where they also had their first *karitela* ride. The sixth day was spent at Corregidor Island to give them better understanding of the events that happened during the American Era in the Philippines.



The next 3 days were spent in Cagayan De Oro City and Camiguin Island. The group was welcomed by Cagayan De Oro City Mayor Vicente Emano during the courtesy call. Ms.

Nanette Roa, City Tourism Officer, and her staff accompanied the group in touring around the city and visiting places like the Makahambus Cave and Adventure Park where they did the canopy walk and zip lining. The participants were also given the opportunity to interact with the students of the Mindanao Polytechnic State University, and witness a breathtaking dance performance by its students. In Camiguin, they were awed by the Katibawasan Falls, White Island, and Ardent Hot Springs. They also enjoyed the jeepney rides, which to most participants was their first time.

They travelled by bus from Cagayan De Oro City to Davao City and was able to see more of the beautiful sceneries in the province. In Davao City, they were warmly received by Deputy Mayor Myrna Ortiz during the courtesy call, and by Councilor Datu Mahipus during the welcome dinner hosted by the City Government. Among the places visited in the city are the Philippine Eagle Center, Malagos Garden Resort, and Eden Nature Park. They also had a heartwarming experience when they distributed gifts to the children at the pediatric ward of the Davao Medical Center. They say that the activity made them realize how blessed they are and wanted to help more people in the country through the CFO's



Understanding the Philippines through Travel



LINKAPIL Program. The group spent a day of swimming, snorkeling, and boating in Samal Island.

Their visit to the Philippines would never be complete without shopping. They shopped endlessly from Greenhills to Robinson's Place in Manila, and the SM Mall of Asia. They also did the same while they were in Cagayan De Oro and Davao.



At the closing ceremony, the participants prepared dance and song numbers, and shared their insights about the things they learned from the two-week program. Most of them intend to come back and join one of the future *Lakbay-Aral* Programs of the CFO together with their friends and relatives.



Lakbay-Aral, developed and implemented by CFO since 1983, is a two-week study-visit program to the Philippines intended for 15-25 year old youth with Filipino ancestry or anyone who would like to learn more about the Philippines.

The Commission on Filipinos Overseas invites all Filipino youth overseas to come and visit the Philippines through its *Lakbay-Aral* Program.

For more inquiries about the *Lakbay-Aral* Program, please contact the Program Coordinator at telephone numbers (632) 561-8321 local 605 or 561-8327, fax number (632) 561-8332, or e-mail at cfodfa@info.com.ph.

CFO highlights

CFO hosts Philippines- Hawaii Lecture Series



Among the many activities to commemorate the Centennial Year of Filipino Migration to Hawaii, the Commission on Filipinos Overseas organized the Philippines-Hawaii Lecture Series on the theme *100 Years in Hawaii: The Filipino Legacy*. The series of lectures aims to promote a greater understanding of the achievement and contributions of Filipino migrants in Hawaii, and stimulate an exchange of ideas and dialogue on issues and concerns related to Filipino migration.

From July 3-18, 2006, the lectures were held at the following venues: Department of Foreign Affairs (July 3); Mariano Marcos State University, Batac, Ilocos Norte (July 5), University of Northern Philippines, Vigan, Ilocos Sur (July 6), Saint Louis College, San Fernando City, La Union (July 7), Virgen Milagrosa University, San Carlos City, Pangasinan (July 10), Cebu Normal University, Cebu City (July 13), and University of the Philippines-Diliman (July 18).

Topics discussed during the lectures included the historical development of the Filipino community in Hawaii and the United States; the impact of the 1906 migration to Hawaii; and issues and concerns of Filipino immigrants in Hawaii and the United States, among others.

The main speaker, Dr. Belinda A. Aquino, is a distinguished professor of Political Science and Asian Studies, and also the Director of the Center for Philippine Studies at the University of Hawaii in Manoa. A group of reactors from the academe, the government, and the Philippine Migration Research Network also joined the lectures providing valuable insights and sharing their views on various migration issues that emerged from the lecture.

The lecture provided participants, composed of students, members of the academe and the larger community, numbering about 200-500 per school, a meaningful opportunity to relate their views on various issues concerning migration and understand its dynamics from a unique historical context.

Philippines debuts at the 12th Honolulu Festival



The Honolulu
Festival Logo

In celebration of the centennial year of Filipino migration to Hawaii, the Philippines debuted at the 2006 Honolulu Festival held on March 10-12, 2006 in Honolulu, Hawaii. The Philippines' participation was spearheaded by the Department of Tourism, Philippine Consulate General in Honolulu and the Commission on Filipinos Overseas with support from the Filipino community organizations in Honolulu and Los Angeles.

The 24-man-strong Philippine cultural contingent participated in the three-day festival that showcased ethnic performances, crafts exhibits, and other cultural activities capped by spectacular street dancing and parade down Kalakaua Avenue in Waikiki on 12 March 2006.

The highly-acclaimed Sining Kambayoka dancers, a cultural group that originated from the Mindanao State University was headed by multi-awarded streetdancing choreographer Basilidas Pelapil and veteran tribal dance instructor Joy Orbe-Brown. Pelapil and Brown worked hand in hand to train volunteer dancers from Honolulu who joined the festivities.

At the Honolulu Festival, the Sining Kambayoka dancers showcased the historical tapestry of the Philippines, starting with the first wave of Filipino immigrants to the United States 100 years ago, down to the Spanish colonial rule, the era of the Philippine republic, and the current diaspora of Filipino overseas workers.

The Honolulu Festival started in March 1995 when various ethnic associations in Japan and Hawaii in partnership with public and private sectors, decided to put up the initial staging of the Honolulu Festival. Today, it has become Hawaii's premier cultural event, "promoting understanding, economic cooperation and economic harmony" among the people of Hawaii and the Asia Pacific region.



The Sining Kambayoka dance troupe pose during a break in performances at the Honolulu Festival.

Among the countries who participated in the Festival are Japan, Australia and the Republic of China (Taiwan).

Centennial Stamp Design Exhibit journeys to five Philippine cities and Hawaii

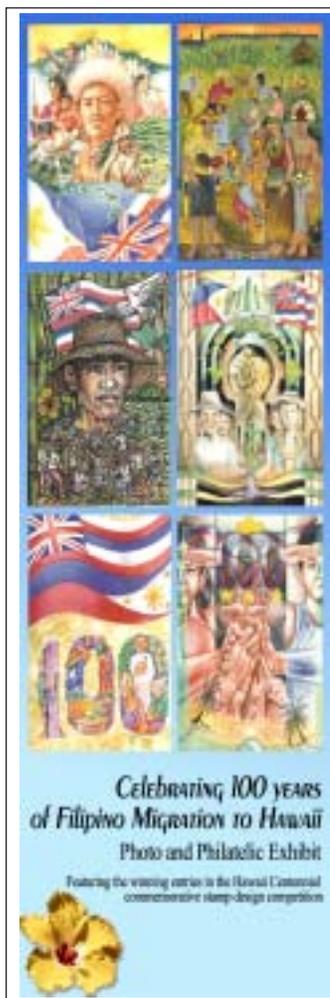
The Hawaii Centennial roving stamp design exhibit, launched by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas as part of the centennial celebration of Filipino migration to Hawaii, recently completed its first run journeying to Manila, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur and Pangasinan, and culminating in Kauai and Honolulu, Hawaii in May 2006.

Conducted in partnership with the National Commission for Culture and the Arts and the Philippine Postal Corporation, the travelling exhibit showcases the exceptional entries in both the professional and student categories of the Hawaii Centennial Stamp Design Competition which ran from September 8 to October 31, 2005. The exhibit is a tribute to the accomplishment of the first group of Filipino migrants who arrived in Hawaii 100 years ago and their subsequent achievements in the island state and elsewhere in the United States.

The stamp design exhibits held in the Ilocos region, which also coincided with the Pamulinawen Festival in Laoag, the 5th *Intayon Cabugao Festival* and the *Pista y Dayat* in Lingayen, Pangasinan, were well-received by the local residents as well as visiting *balikbayans* who attended the town events. The exhibit also served as an opportunity for the CFO to market the centennial commemorative stamps, and promote the various programs of the CFO to the public amidst the festive spirit.

Mayor Bryan Baptiste of Kaua'i County in Hawaii, who graced the inauguration of the philatelic exhibit in Manila early this year, formally opened the two-day exhibit at the Kaua'i War Memorial Convention Hall on 6 May 2006. Coinciding with the Kaua'i Filipino Fiesta celebration, the exhibit drew a steady crowd of viewers as throngs of Kaua'i residents and tourists gathered to participate in the festivities.

In cooperation with the Philippine Consulate General in Honolulu and the office of Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hanneman, the exhibit was also put on display at the Honolulu Hale on 11 May 2006, and at Kapiolani Park on 13 May 2006 to coincide with the city's annual Filipino Fiesta. Mayor Hanneman and the city council of Honolulu also passed a resolution declaring May 11 as *Centennial Stamp Day*. Similar to its previous runs, the philatelic exhibits in Honolulu also received positive responses from the viewing public, and hopefully resulted to better appreciation of the significance of celebrating 100 years of Filipino migration to Hawaii.



Congratulations to our Literary and Editorial Cartoon Contest Winners!

Ten literary artists emerged as winners to the recently concluded *100 Years of Filipino Migration to Hawaii Literary Contest* out of more than 110 entries submitted in three categories. Meanwhile, fourteen editorial cartoonists from various newspapers and journals all over the country were cited for their editorial cartoons depicting hundred years of Filipino migration to Hawaii. The following bagged the top prizes:

Poetry

- 1st Prize - Genaro R. Gojo Cruz of San Jose Del Monte City, Bulacan
- 2nd Prize - Dexter B. Cayanes of Pasig City
- 3rd Prize - Joel H. Vega of Nijmegen, Netherlands

Essay

- Jan Lord V. Lumabao of Dingras, Ilocos Norte
- Ariel Edgar G. Ponce of Quezon City
- Rachelle D. Ubal of Makati City
- Special Award*
- Ma. Socorro Q. Perez of Makati City

One-Act Play

- 1st Prize - Aristeo T. Rivera of Cebu City, Cebu
- 2nd Prize - Maria Clarissa N. Estuar of Mandaluyong City
- 3rd Prize - Romeo P. Peña of Sta. Mesa, Manila



Editorial Cartoon Competition

- 1st Place - Norman B. Isaac of Manila Bulletin
- 2nd Place - Rio S. Villegas of Sun Star Cebu
- 3rd Place - Fiel C. Camacho of The Ilocos Times

Honorable Mention

- Josua Cabrera of Sun Star Cebu
- Gilbert Daroy of Philippine Daily Inquirer
- Alex Delas Alas of Bandera
- Dominador Pagliawan of Leyte Samar Daily Express
- Ramesh A. Rosilio of The Freeman
- Jose K. San Luis of People's Journal
- Edwin Venturina of Tanod

Citation

- Romeo V. Castro of People's Taliba
- Paolo L. Simbulan of Manila Bulletin
- Jogin C. Tamayo of Baguio Midland Courier
- Bladimer C. Usi of Hataw

Public and private...

continued from page 12

real estate developers, and proponents of businesses that require huge financial investments.

Banks lure prospective remitters through the introduction of enhanced mode of remittance transfers, better rates or minimal deposit requirements, the establishment of additional remittance centers in host countries, and strengthened tie-ups with foreign money transfer agents. Aside from their remittance service, these financial institutions offer products that answer migrants and their beneficiaries' need for savings, insurance, housing loans, educational loans and livelihood assistance. Banks also market stable securities, such as government treasury bills, treasury bonds, foreign currency deposit accounts, and other savings and investment instruments specifically designed for overseas workers. Real estate companies and property developers actively pursue Filipino overseas buyers of residential lots, house and lots, and condominium units. A number of franchised businesses are also luring Filipinos overseas who have accumulated significant income and savings abroad to put up and operate their own businesses in the Philippines.

Civil Society-Overseas Filipinos Partnerships

Beyond encouraging OFWs to save in local banks and buy their own houses and lots, non-government organizations, rural banks and cooperatives have taken concrete steps to channel OFW remittances to long-term investments that will directly benefit their local communities.

Among the first to initiate a savings mobilization program for OFWs was UnladKabayan Migrant Services Foundation, an NGO based in Quezon City, and with operations in Davao, Bohol, Cagayan, Iligan, and Zamboanga. Through the help of the Asian Migrant Center, migrants were trained on business skills and taught financial literacy. When funds

PGMA issues ...

continued from page 1

Dorsey was joined by Ms. Kathy Apple and Dr. Casey Marks, Executive Director and Associate Executive Director of NCSBN, respectively. The much anticipated visit was a response to CFO's invitation for NCSBN to visit the Philippines and assess its preparedness in hosting the examination.

NCLEX is a licensure examination taken by more than 9,000 Filipino nurses yearly, who are hoping to seek employment in hospitals and health institutions in the United States. Previously, it could only be taken in U.S. territories and international test centers in Hong Kong, Korea and United Kingdom. NCSBN expanded the number of international test centers in April 2006, allowing NCLEX candidates to take the examination in Australia, Canada, Germany, India, Mexico and Taiwan.

Being the top origin country of foreign-educated nurses taking the NCLEX, CFO took the position that NCSBN should consider the Philippines as an international test center. The two-day visit organized by CFO for NCSBN officials included meetings with other Philippine government agencies which may address concerns on examination security and intellectual property protection. The Philippine Nurses Association also co-organized some of the activities during the two-day visit. Overall, NCSBN officials dubbed the visit as "informative and very helpful" in support of the Philippines' bid to host an international test center for NCLEX. The NCSBN Board is expected to come to a decision by August 2006.

CFO Chairman Dante A. Ang is optimistic that the signed Executive Order would assure the NCSBN that the Philippine government is serious in pursuing this initiative. Reports of leakage during the local nursing board last June 2006 was perceived to have a negative impact on the Philippine bid, but Chairman Ang assured the parties concerned that those who were involved will be punished to the full extent of the law.

grew, migrants were asked to identify possible business prospects within their own communities with the participation of family members left behind. A similar initiative was started by Atikha, Inc. and Balikabayani Foundation. The group focuses its operation in San Pablo City, Laguna and Mabini, Batangas, and forges partnership with overseas Filipino organizations for the development of micro, small and medium enterprises engaged in organic farming, production of virgin coconut oil and other coconut products, eco-tourism, and retirement villages.

The initiatives undertaken by the government, private and civil society organizations to partner with migrant investors provide a better alternative to migrants making their own individual investment decisions. Migrants need these institutions to help them properly identify businesses that are more sustainable and have a significant impact on development. OFWs and their families need to be provided proper training on how to better manage their investments and savings through financial literacy and capacity-building programs. Studies indicate that individual investment decisions made by migrants and their relatives usually result in a large number of small businesses that eventually fail.

In order to have a significant impact on development, migrant investments must be directed and employed in industries or infrastructure that are urgently needed to improve the country's productive capacity. There are some potential prospects in the examples set by migrant civil society organizations focusing the establishment of enterprises in the countryside where majority of the poor reside. Overseas Filipino investors may put their money in rural banks and other micro-finance institutions that reach out to low-income entrepreneurs who could not afford collateralized loans. Remittances should do more in terms of promoting growth and development of the highly marginalized sector of the economy.

CFO devolves ...

continued from page 1

conduct the mandatory guidance and counseling program, the first being the St. Mary Euphrasia Foundation – Center for Overseas Workers (SMEF-COW). The SMEF-COW, located along Aurora Boulevard in Quezon City is convenient for clients coming from the northern provinces. The SMEF-COW may be reached at telephone numbers (02) 9136439, 9111814 or 9136438.

The mandatory guidance and counseling for partners of foreign nationals is part of government efforts to inform Filipinos of the realities of inter-cultural marriages or partnerships, immigration policies and other laws of host countries, as well as available support networks in cases of distress. For further information on the guidance and counseling program and emigrant registration, the CFO may be reached at (02) 5618321.

100 Years of Filipino Migration to Hawaii Mural Painting Competition Launched

All Filipino artists who are 18 years old and above are invited to join the *100 Years of Filipino Migration to Hawaii Mural Painting Competition*, jointly organized by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO), National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), and Art Association of the Philippines (AAP).

Entries to the competition must interpret the theme "100 Years of Filipino Legacy in Hawaii" or depict a significant event or episode related to the centennial of Filipino migration to Hawaii. They must be original and painted using acrylic or oil on a canvass measuring 30" x 45", and mounted box type or museum wrap in flat black. The artwork, which must be accompanied by a brief narrative interpretation, may be submitted personally or via courier at the Kanlungan ng Sining (Artist's Haven), Art Association of the Philippines, Rizal Park (near the National Library), Manila on August 12, 2006 from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

The Grand Prize winner will receive P300,000 and a plaque after painting the entry into mural size canvass (8½ ft. by 12 ft.) which shall be placed on permanent exhibit at the Filipino

Community Center in Hawaii. Five entries will also be chosen as the Jurors' Choice Winners and awarded P50,000 each, after which they shall be exhibited permanently at the Philippine Embassy and Consulates General in the United States. 20 other finalists will also receive special prizes.

To download official entry form and for more information on the mural painting competition, please browse through www.cfo.gov.ph and www.ncca.gov.ph or contact CFO at 561-8329 or 561-8321 locals 600-604.



Philippine Schools... *continued from page 1*

conference to gain more information about the needs of students in said Philippine schools, and discuss its admission policies and requirements. Co-host to the conference was the Manila Xiamen International School in Xiamen. The theme for the fifth Conference was "*Effective Management of Philippine Schools Overseas: Prospects and Challenges*".

Secretary Dante A. Ang, Chairman of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas officially opened the Conference. Education Undersecretary Hidalgo gave the keynote address. Also joining the conference were Consul General Emelinda Lee-Pineda representing the Department of Foreign Affairs and Undersecretary Jose Z. Molano, Jr. of the CFO.

In his message, Chairman Ang lauded the efforts of Philippine schools abroad in providing quality education to children of OFWs. He encouraged them to continue improving the standard of education, and instilling Filipino values to the children to guide them in their everyday life. Undersecretary Hidalgo, on the other hand, underscored the importance of a continuing dialogue between the Inter-Agency Committee and the schools to be able to effectively address the educational needs of Filipino children overseas. She further noted that in spite of many challenges facing the schools, Philippine schools abroad continue to produce excellent graduates who are either admitted to prestigious schools in other countries or top universities and colleges in the Philippines.



DepEd Acting Secretary Fe Hidalgo presented the proposed Two-Year Pre-Baccalaureate Program

Serving as resource speakers during the conference were no less than Acting Secretary Fe A. Hidalgo, Assistant Secretary Camilo Miguel Montesa, Dr. Lolita Andrada and Dr. Teresita Inciong, heads of the Bureau of Secondary and Elementary Education respectively of the DepEd, and Dr. Alberto Mendoza. Discussions included topics on "*Management of Stakeholders*", "*Management of School Outcomes*", the "*Proposed Two-year Pre-Baccalaureate Program*", and "*Child-friendly School System*". The forum also gave an opportunity for schools to consult with representatives of the Inter-Agency Committee about their concerns on school management and operation.

At present, there are about 20,000 children of overseas Filipinos and other nationalities who are enrolled in 39 Philippine schools operating in 9 countries. Of the 39 Philippine schools abroad, 29 have been accredited by the Philippine Government to use the Philippine Basic Education Curriculum, while others are in various stages of application for accreditation with the Department of Education.



PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR INITIATIVES IN OPTIMIZING MIGRANT REMITTANCES FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Philippines is the third-largest migrant-sending country worldwide, with nearly 10% of its 81 million population living and working overseas. Overseas Filipinos remitted an average of eight billion dollars in annual remittances in the last five years, with a record Php10,689,005 in 2005 alone. However, the Philippines has yet to maximize utilization of overseas Filipino remittances for economic development.

In recent years, both the civil society and private sectors have gained interest in promoting more sustainable uses of remittances in the home country. The following are the initiatives being undertaken by the government, private and civil society organizations in leveraging migrant inflows for growth and development.

Government Initiatives

In the last three decades, the Philippines has passed several laws to encourage Filipinos overseas to return, as well as look into the prospects of investing in the Philippines. The earliest of these initiatives was the *Balikbayan* program. This long-running program offers *balikbayans* and returning workers exemption from travel tax as well as from duties and taxes on capital equipment for use in businesses.

Having given them legal status as *balikbayans*, the government took further steps in legislating for the rights and welfare of former Filipinos and Filipinos who live or work abroad. These laws include right to land ownership, tax exemptions, retirement benefits and equal investment rights under the Foreign Investment Act and the Retail Trade Liberalization Act among others.

In 2003, the Dual Citizenship Law was passed removing major obstacles which prevent more overseas Filipinos from participating in the development of the country through property ownership, investments, savings and other productive undertakings that could generate livelihood and employment.



In order to maximize the benefits of the dual citizenship law and provide Filipinos overseas who are planning to retire in the Philippines with better options on how to invest and do business in the country, the CFO has developed the *Investment and Business Guide*

for Overseas Filipinos. This two-part compendium was designed to help assess prospects for investing and doing business in the Philippines, particularly in small to medium enterprises. It also gives examples of specific industries or enterprises with attractive potentials for the information of prospective investors as well as the requirements for doing business from the standpoint of regulatory agencies including local government units.

To assist prospective entrepreneurs and investors, the government, through the Department of Trade and Industry has developed training programs that aim to enhance the competence of would-be entrepreneurs. The DTI is now working with the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration in promoting franchised businesses to OFWs through the *"Migrante Maging Negosyante"* project, which aims to transform overseas Filipinos into overseas Filipino investors. On the other hand, OFWs and their families may take advantage of the loan assistance package and credit facilities offered by the Development Bank of the Philippines, Land Bank, People's Credit and Finance Corporation and other government financial institutions for the establishment of small and medium enterprises.



Private Sector Initiatives

Among the major components of the private sector's initiatives to channel the flow of overseas remittance are banks, insurance companies,

see Public and private, page 10

Commission on Filipinos Overseas
1/F - 7/F Citigold Center,
1345 Quirino Ave., corner South Superhighway
Manila, Philippines
P.O. Box 1388

ARE YOU MOVING?

In case you are moving or changing your address, the Commission on Filipinos Overseas would like to request you to inform us of your new address, so we can serve you better.

Thank you.

Lakbay-Aral 2006

Friends, family, culture and history in a suitcase

By Diana Diroy

With a closing ceremony, testimonies, performances, and our final lunch together, *Lakbay Aral's* two-week program ended on Tuesday, Aug 1. Most of the participants flew back home, but some decided to stay with their families to try to make the most with their visit back home. So, here I am, at my Auntie's house, editing some of the hundreds of pictures I took, reliving all the places we visited, remembering all the welcoming people we have met, craving all the delicious food we ate, appreciating everything I've learned, and ALREADY missing it all.

For many of the participants, it was their first visit to the Philippines. For me, it was my fourth, but it was actually my first real exposure to the history and culture of the Philippines. All the past times I have visited, it was solely to visit family. It was not until recently that I wanted to really define what it meant to be Filipino, and it was not until *Lakbay Aral* did I really get a taste of what it really meant.

Being born in the United States as a Filipino-American, one is not given the history of their Filipino people, heritage or culture. Rather than learning about Rizal, we learn about Abraham Lincoln. Rather than learning about Andres Bonifacio and the Katipunan, we hear about the Founding Fathers of America. And rarely do people actually know the involvement of Filipino soldiers fighting side-by-side American soldiers, during World War II. To have the opportunity to learn about such legendary heroes that are the root cause of our independence as Filipinos – and especially having the chance to visit Corregidor Island and Rizal Park – brought the past to life as well as deepen my appreciation for having such a rich history.

Being exposed to the diversity of my culture also further deepened my pride of being a Filipino. From watching students from the Philippine Women's University and Mindanao State Polytechnic University dance and sing, to watching women dance along the shore of Samal, illustrated the diversity within the Philippines. These performances are all cultural dances, but there are so many different stories told – from the butterfly garden to the eagle dance – all were performed beautifully. Going to the museums and learning about the prehistoric times in the Philippines, also showed the richness of our culture. I have learned that our history lies beyond Spanish and American colonization – and it is evident in the dances we witnessed and the artifacts collected in the museums.

Besides the history lesson and the exposure to the many influences that make up the Filipino culture, I cannot forget the true beauty of the Philippines. It lies within the fertile landscape that we drove through from Cagayan de Oro to Davao, in the blue waters that our boat zipped through as we went island hopping, it's in the white sand of the islands we visited, but most importantly, beauty is found in the people we have come across.

One night, I with two other participants-Sarah and Abe- walked along Baywalk located in Manila- which is almost similar to San Francisco's Pier 39- and I said to Abe, "I hope I run into one of my cousins here." He responded, "Look around. They are all your cousins."

Throughout the whole trip, I have met so many people. Whether it being Allen Jadie, the project manager of the trip, the 32 participants of *Lakbay Aral*, the professors and students of the Philippine Women's University and the Mindanao State Polytechnic College, the indigenous dancers of Cagayan de Oro and Davao, the children at the Davao Medical Center, and even vendors we have come across throughout the trip – they all have defined the Philippines for me: diverse, beautiful, and definitely a place I can call home.



I was climbing the ladder into the bahay kubo located in the courtyard at the Philippine National Museum when one of the curators approached me. I thought she was going to caution me but instead, she explained that the natives built these structures out of the abundant natural materials because even though they were not the most durable of materials and were subject to being destroyed by natural events, such as the many typhoons that pour through the northern Philippines, they were relatively easy to repair, or if necessary to be completely rebuilt. That concept seemed to me to be also imbedded in the many shanties we had seen built out of scraps of metal and wood that so many Filipinos call home. Things might suffer damages, but could always be repaired.

Along with that notion of being able to easily repair or replace such structures, I was reminded of the concept of BAHALA NA what will be will be, or "it's God's will", as a complimentary way to explain and accept life's challenges and events, and then going on with one's life. It appeared to me that many Filipinos have lots of challenges just to exist; from the folks who live in metropolitan areas to those who live in the rural areas; many folks appear to be barely scraping by. Still in all, Filipinos appear to be a resilient lot, and whether or not many of their living conditions equate to happiness is left open to closer investigation. It is clear, though, that most Filipinos hold a strong work ethic. My father used to tell me and my siblings to "Study hard and get a good job." Seems he was sharing a commonly held belief.

And happiness, it seems true, is perceived by the beholder. While on the great bus ride from Cagayan De Oro City to Davao City, crossing the heart of Mindanao from the cities through villages, vast verdant spaces and mountains, I saw beautiful landscapes, and people living their lives. Still in Cagayan De Oro, I saw a boy of perhaps 10 playing on a sidewalk with a bamboo stick and a tin can. He placed the can on the end of the stick and would toss it up high in the air and attempt to catch it on the end of the stick, again and again. It held his complete attention, a stick and a can. Not a "Game Boy", yet a game boy, nonetheless.

Much further on that grand ride besides the fields of corn, sugar cane and other crops, there were many rice paddies and terraces. Waddling along the side of one there was a man riding his caribou, both seemingly one with another, and one with nature. Timeless, they are walking, still.

Many kilometers later, in front of their true bahay kubo, in their vegetable garden that also served as their front yard, I saw a young mother, squatting, and enveloped in her arms was her little girl, of 2 or 3. Mother and daughter, facing and beaming at one another with absolute joy. How rich they are, I thought.



BARANGAY is derived from the Malay word balangay or balanghai, a large and swift boat in which the early Malay immigrants from the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago traveled to the Philippines. Measuring at least eighty feet in length, a barangay could carry from thirty to sixty people, and the word eventually came to mean "a clan".

Upon the many bus trips we took meandering through the metro areas, I noted a good many side streets with signs or arches declaring that this was a *barangay*. The neighborhoods had distinct names, varied by sizes, and apparent wealth, although none that I saw seemed to be wealthy. These governing bodies appear to be ones that are closest to the citizens, with their own duly elected officers, and captains.

It struck me, while dozing on one of those bus rides, that the 2006 *Lakby-aral California* group, including the CFO staff, formed a kind of *barangay*, albeit a mobile and transient one. And perhaps more than a *barangay*, one could say that the group formed one's *barkada*, at least for these two weeks and then again perhaps for longer. Our *barangay "Lakby-Aral"* officers surely must be the Commission on Filipinos Overseas and Department of Philippine Tourism staff, who filtered in and out of the *barangay* so seamlessly, and who served so aptly and are so appreciated. They are always part of our *barkada*.

And of course, every *barangay* must have a captain, and ours is obvious. While quietly and effectively shepherding us along while dealing with our 30 some different needs, and while always keeping us safe and happy (almost all of the time), she served exceptionally with a seemingly ever-present smile. So here is yet another thank you to our captain, *Allen Joyce*.

We learned to appreciate a lot about the Philippines, and I believe about one another and ourselves. We discovered a great deal about culture and heritage on this trip, including the fact that there are many diverse tribes that populated different parts of this archipelago. And we learned that there was a great deal going on much earlier than the mid-1500's and the beginning of the Spanish era, then later the United States colonization, both of which have left indelible marks on the country, its government and its citizens. The voyage to Corregidor Island helped to firm a sense of the historical events that demonstrated the bravery of the Filipinos and Americans. We also were given the opportunity to interact and give gifts to children in a public hospital, and we were touched. The planned itinerary was great, and again, staff was so helpful and friendly that even getting up with the sun was plausible due to their thorough explanations on the necessity for waking early. Each participant got something unique from the tour; while we traveled and studied together, it always comes down to the individual as to their openness to learn, and their perceptions of the experiences. I believe, though, that everyone came away with a valuable and perhaps life influencing experience.

Of Bahay Kubos, bus rides and Barangays

Since I'm not musically inclined or dance oriented, and certainly not a thespian of any sort, I decided to do what I'm most acquainted with, and that is to write. And I chose a topic that reflects what I perceived from the previous fourteen days. These are simply my reflections, perceptions, interpretations and notions as seen & discerned through the filter of a Filipino- American's eyes, and likely have little to do with accuracy. I leave that to the reader to determine.

Richard Responde
Closing ceremonies. *Lakby-Aral* 2006