

THE PHILIPPINE CENTER – A BRIEF HISTORY AND UP-DATE

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January 12, 2001

(With Suggestions by Volette Singson, Eddie Escall and Jojo Ramos)

The year 2000 was characterized by concerted activity, not only to consolidate the organizational structure of the Philippine Center, but also to clarify its objectives, especially as it relates to the other Filipino and Asian organizations, and to raise funds to help attain its objectives. Let us compare this year to the previous five, beginning with the inception of what now is the Philippine Cultural and Civic Center Foundation, Inc. The first recorded meeting to organize the Philippine Center was in February 18, 1995. There were three more meetings after that until the first town hall meeting in November 3, 1995 was held. Many people were involved and it would not serve any useful purpose to try to name them all at this point – certainly, for the sake of our records this will be addressed in the future. Suffice it to say that Roger Austria, conducting all of these meetings, and Kris Vasquez, recording the proceedings, were very much in the thick of all the activities. Manny Galang provided legal advice. Attention focused on designing an effectively functioning organization with tax-exempt status.

For one reason or another, but mainly because the active participants were also busy working people, the objectives of the organization were not realized. It became clear that we needed people who were not only willing to work and had the passion for it, but also had the time to devote to the immense task that lay ahead. There were five such people at this time: Joe Yamat, Jr., Emraida Kiram, Jojo Ramos, Gerry Ramos and Ely Suson. Also, Manny Galang continued to be the legal adviser. They were in constant communication with each other starting in early 1999. The papers to obtain tax-exempt status were re-filed in June 1999. Approval under IRS Tax-exempt Code 501 (c) 3 was obtained on January 1, 2000.

The composition of the Board of Trustees (to replace the previous Steering Committee) and the officers was decided upon by the five incorporators (Joe Yamat, Jr., Emraida Kiram, Jojo Ramos, Gerry Ramos and Ely Suson). The first meeting was held on April 30, 2000. Since then, significant events have occurred at a much faster pace:

I. Free medical clinic: This is still the hottest item in our agenda. Its existence and continued operation is largely due to the commitment of Volette and Johnny Singson and a retinue of loyal doctors and assistants. Also, there are many people involved. (Which reminds me of what John Cherba once said: "the difference between commitment and involvement is like ham and egg – the chicken is involved but the poor pig is committed.") The clinic opened at Oak Creek Community Center on October 28, 2000 and continued for five more Saturdays until December 16, when we had our last clinic there. With the help of Alex Vinluan, Dr. Waleed Najeeb, a very generous and helpful guy, gave the go ahead signal for us to use his beautiful office on 2501 West Silver Spring Road. Unfortunately, however, the city of Glendale rejected our request for a permit to use the place – the reason being that we are a non-profit organization. An odd reason, I think, because despite its affluence, the city of Glendale has its own share of indigent and uninsured. Never willing to give up and again through the efforts of Alex Vinluan, the clinic obtained the permission of Dr. Waleed Najeeb to use his office on 5542 West Fond du Lac Avenue (across from Capitol Court Shopping Center).

The dates scheduled are January 27, February 10 and 24, March 10 and 31, and April 7 and 28. The time: from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM. A flyer has been posted at our website: www.philippinecenter.com.

In addition to the above mentioned doctors, the following people have actively participated in the operation of the clinic: Ramon and Puring Agor, Buddy and Rica del Rosario, Ed and Nieva Escall, Rene and Cora Felizmena, Pining Gardinier, Bee and Nemia Gimenez, P. Emraida Kiram, Rei and Edna Lesada, Romy and Tessie Lo, Babs Mabini, Dar and Nellie Muceno, Flor Ortiguera, Jazmin Parcon, Von and Ennie Perez, Fe Quevedo, Gerry and B.J. Agoncillo-Ramos, Linda Ramos, Angel Robles, Ruben and Jessie Romero, Adela Smith, Carmelita Stehr, Ely Suson, Alex Vinluan and Walter Wong.


II. Fund-raising: With Jimmy Yamat and Gerry Ramos as co-chairpersons of the committee, and Volette Singson, Johnny Singson and their office help participating, close to 700 donation solicitations were mailed between December 15 and 22, 2000 – as most of you may have noticed by now. As of this date (January 12, 2001) we have received \$30,000.00 in checks and \$9,000.00 in new pledges (there are still a little over \$150,000.00 of the old pledges). We expect more to come. This initial mailing was largely confined to the Filipinos and their close friends. Our community has been very generous. An outstanding example is Mameng Montoro (I have permission to reveal her name), who advanced payment of \$100.00 for a pledge of \$6,000.00 to be paid every month for a period of 5 years. There were many other generous donors but I do not have the liberty to give their names.

The reality is, however, that we do not expect everybody to give large sums. Due to economic circumstances some may not be able to give at all. If nothing else, we ask for everybody's participation in the activities at the Philippine Center.

III. Non-monetary donations: Donations have not always come in the form of money. Volette and Johnny Singson donated the Philippine Center website (www.philippinecenter.com). They are paying the yearly fee. Their son, Joey, set up the website and is the webmaster. In addition, they donated a computer, a scanner and a printer.

Suson Eye Specialists, M.D., S.C. is donating some 20 waiting room chairs. We need help to transport these chairs to the Philippine Center.

The karaoke donated by Tom Chua has given our singers many great moments of enjoyment.



IV. On-going and planned activities: Eddie and Nieva Escall became the co-chair persons of this committee and have initiated the on-going chess match. Other activities on the pipeline include volley ball, ping-pong, jam sessions ball-room dancing and lessons on self-defense. These, however, need the participation of many people. We invite everybody to come join us at the Philippine Center.

Under the auspices of Dain Rauscher (Investment Company), a string recital by young Filipino professionals is tentatively planned for June 23, 2001 as a fund-raising event. The performers include Joanna Mendoza (viola), Joseph Ortiguera(violin), Jason Vinluan(violin) and Marvin Suson(violin). An accompanying pianist will be chosen by the performers. Pending the final decision of the performers, the format will be: (1) The first part will consist of classical western music. (2) The second part will show-case Filipino compositions in various forms and jazz. There will be a fifteen-minute intermission.

Dain Rauscher will provide \$2,000.00 to help finance the event. More funds will be obtained by selling tickets and spots for advertisements in the souvenir program.

Eddy and Nieva Escall, with Jojo Ramos assisting, are coordinating this event which will be co-sponsored by FAAWIS, PMAW (with the Auxiliary), USTAAW, UPAAW and other Filipino organizations.

This is all for now. I hope that your stamina carried you through the entire up-date inspite of your tired and weepy eyes, Subsequent updates (every two to four weeks) will be much shorter.