

LEADERS' DIGEST

Filipinos are everywhere in America – from the East to the West coast. However, as the second largest Asian American community in America, we still have to empower ourselves to become more visible in the political mainstream. Unknown to us, fellow FilAms are making a difference across the US – as appointed and elected leaders in their respective areas. The Asian Journal Leaders' Digest aims to present to readers these leaders who have made – and continually making a difference for the Filipino American community.

Benito Miranda – A true community leader

by CYNTHIA DE CASTRO
AJPress

IN most cities across America, Cultural Arts Commissions exist to honor citizens whose contributions to the arts and achievements are formally recognized; to expand the utilization of the Cultural Arts Center by both touring and local artists, and to broaden community awareness of the arts through work with PTAs and other citizen groups and organizations. In the City of Torrance in Los Angeles County, the Vice Chairman of the Cultural Arts Commission is Benito Miranda, appointed as the City's first ever Filipino American Cultural Arts Commissioner. Appointed to the Commission in 2006, Miranda's term expires in 2010. It speaks volumes of Miranda to be appointed Vice Chair of the

Commission. He is tasked to continue honoring Torrance citizens who have made significant contributions to the arts. Certainly, your City honors you if it appointed you to honor its noteworthy citizens.

Benito Moras Miranda was born in Cebu City, Philippines, the son of a prominent family of Spanish/Chinese heritage. He moved to the United States in 1968 to attend school at Woodbury College in Los Angeles, majoring in Business Management with a minor in International Trade. By his junior year he became the school's first foreign student body president.

In his early years in California, Ben's love for his country made him seek out avenues that allowed him to be a part of the Filipino – American community. By 1969, he was one of the original members of the Filipino Basketball Youth Association.

After graduating from college, Ben became Operations officer for Security Pacific Bank in Burbank and later Assistant Cashier for City National Bank headquartered in Beverly Hills, CA. Soon after, Ben moved to Montana where he worked in Butte as HUD's Community Development Fiscal Officer and then moved to Billings to work for a couple of different financial and investment organizations such as New York Life and First Bank's Insurance Division.

After 10 years in Montana, Ben returned to Los Angeles. His diverse experiences in management, creative sales and marketing strategies have helped to expand markets and maximize sales resulting in substantial profits for the

companies he worked for.

Ben's love for the Filipino-American community is evidenced by his participation in civic and community events. As the Territory Manager, South Los Angeles County area for his company, PacifiCare's Secure Horizons Medicare Division, a division of United Health Care, Ben not only assists in promulgating Filipino-American causes, but also uses his influences in the corporate arena to gain access to corporate awareness for the Fil-Am groups he is currently a member of. Acknowledgement of his contributions came in the form of a Certificate of Appreciation from the Philippine Consul General of Los Angeles.

Benito Miranda has never been the type to just rest on his laurels; he has always wanted to give more of himself to noteworthy causes that will make his life more meaningful. A true community leader, Benito became president of the Board of Directors of SIPA (Search to Involve Pilipino Americans), where he previously served as one of its Board Members beginning in 2000. He was also Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors for FASGI (Filipino American Service Group). Ben continues to sit on the Board of Fil-Am Athletes International, NAARC, and the Federation of Fil-Am Associations of Long Beach. He has also been recently elected President of the Rotary Club of Historic Filipinotown.

Ben has made it one of his life's goals to do his part in enhancing the quality of life of Filipino Americans in LA and throughout Southern California. That's why he continues to passionately serve the FilAm community thru SIPA, the largest Filipino American non profit organization in the US. His passion is to make a better future for the next generation. He once gave an emotional speech in a SIPA event, fighting back tears as he summed up one of SIPA's core focus: "Do not forget our children. Nothing can replace the joy of seeing hope in the eyes of a young child."

This community leader has come a long way from his childhood days in Cebu. His greatest wish today? To celebrate his 60th birthday in his hometown a few months from now, on January 30, 2009, with his wife, artist Becca Godinez, and their two daughters, Natasha and Ann Marie. Certainly, it is a time of celebration and a time to honor this Cebuano – yet another Filipino who makes us Pinoys proud. ■

Michael P. Guingona, Daly City Councilmember

DALY City Councilmember Michael (Mike) P. Guingona may perhaps be the most recognizable and longest-elected official of Filipino American heritage in San Mateo County. Guingona was first elected to the Daly City Council in 1993, after an unsuccessful bid in 1992. He has since been reelected to the city council four times (1994, 1998, 2002 and 2006).

Mike has had many firsts as a Fil-Am in the Daly City Council, notably as the first Fil-Am elected to it, and the youngest to serve as Daly City Mayor at age 33.

Mike Guingona has been Daly City Mayor four times (1995, 1997, 2001 and 2005) and Daly City Vice Mayor for one term, aside from serving his community as member of the San Mateo County (SMC) District Board of Directors (which he chaired in 2001) and the San Mateo County Transportation Authority (which he chaired in 2003).

The San Francisco-born Guingona is actively involved with the Sister City Committee and was instrumental in initiating the Daly City-Quezon City (Philippines) Sister City partnership.

According to Councilmember Guingona, it was during the years following law school that he developed a growing interest in local government. He also saw the changing demographics of Daly City, which motivated him to run for a seat in the City Council.

Prior to winning a seat in the Daly City Council, Mike worked as a full-time Deputy Public Defender in the San Francisco Public Defender's Office, a job which he kept until 1999 when he left the Public Defender's Office to establish his



own law practice in San Francisco, specializing in criminal defense.

Guingona's professional affiliations include membership in the California Trial Lawyers Association, the State Bar of California, the Bar Association of San Francisco, the Filipino Bar Association of Northern California and the California Public Defenders Association.

Mike Guingona has lived in Daly City for most of his life, the only exception being the time when he attended the University of California at Los

Angeles (UCLA) and earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in History. He attended Daly City Public Schools and graduated from Westmoor High School where he was class president during his senior year, a foreshadowing of his future role as a respected community activist and leader.

Guingona pursued his Juris Doctor at the University of San Francisco Law School where he received his law degree in 1989. Soon afterward, he was admitted to the State Bar of California.

Aside from his duties as a Daly City Councilmember and his law practice, Councilmember Guingona is actively involved in youth wrestling. In fact, he has coached his son Kai with the Coastside Grapplers Wrestling Club since 2007.

More recently, Mike was elected to the 5th Supervisorial District of the San Mateo County Democratic Central Committee. He is the only current Fil-Am member of the committee, whose mission is to support Democratic candidates and elected officials at all levels of government as well as ballot measures promoting Democratic values in San Mateo County and the State of California. ■

A FilAm in the US Congress Rep. Robert Scott: Blazing the Way

HE may not be a full-blooded Filipino, but Filipino Americans consider Congressman Robert Cortez Scott as one of their own.

Sixteen years ago, on November 1992, Robert "Bobby" Scott was elected to the US House of Representatives. By winning in that election, Rep. Scott made history by becoming the first African American elected to Congress from Virginia for over 100 years, next only to John Mercer Langston who is the Father of Black Politics by virtue of being the first African American ever elected to office in America.

There is a little known fact about Rep. Bobby Scott - his lolo (grandfather) on his mother's side is Pinoy. This gives the Congressman from Virginia the distinction of being the first American with Filipino heritage to serve in the United States Congress.

Overcoming the odds, being a trendsetter and making history are traits that Congressman Scott inherited from his Filipino grandfather, Valentin Cortez. As a boy in the Philippines, Valentin wanted to escape the hardships in his hometown and seek greener pastures whatever the cost.

Eventually, he stowed away in a ship bound for the United States. The ship's Captain Hamlin, an American, discovered the young lad and decided to adopt him.

Valentin went home with his adoptive father to



North Carolina where he grew up and got a good education. Taking the name of the captain, he became known as Valentin Cortez Hamlin. Valentin became a pharmacist and married an African American. His daughter, Mae Hamlin Scott, is the Congressman's mother.

While practicing law in Newport News, Scott served in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1978 to 1983 and in the Senate of Virginia from 1983 to 1993.

During his tenure in the Virginia General Assembly, Rep. Scott successfully sponsored laws that are critical to Virginians in healthcare, education, employment, economic development, crime prevention, social services and consumer protection. His legislative successes included laws that improved healthcare benefits for infants and children, increased the Virginia minimum wage and created the Governor's Employment and Training Council.

His outstanding performance in Virginia was not unnoticed by the State, which has been electing Scott to serve in the US House of Representatives for eight consecutive terms now.

Rep. Scott currently serves as the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security, and is a member of the House Committee on Education and Labor and the House Committee on Budget. ■

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The **Voice of FilAmerica**

Political empowerment is still a treasure that eludes us as a community here in America. While we are the second largest Asian American community in the United States, we have yet to harvest the power that comes from our numbers. The Voice of FilAmerica features elected and appointed officials – regardless of political affiliation – in the different US states who are of Filipino ancestry. As your Filipino American community newspaper, the Asian Journal recognizes the fact that we all have a responsibility towards bringing political empowerment to fruition, especially for our future generations. It is our hope to have our voices heard all over America.



Belen Gabato A nurse's moment in the spotlight

by BILLY DELA CRUZ
AJPress

ONE of the founders of the Philippine Nurses Association of Las Vegas, nurse Belen Gabato was appointed December 14 last year as one the seven members of the Nevada State Board of Nursing.

Gabato is now not only nurturing the public health, safety, and welfare of Nevada through nursing regulation, she now also represents all the many Filipino nurses in Nevada. Gabato is also a member of the Women's health connection Coalition of the Nevada State Health division.

Gabato, a graduate from the the Southwestern University in Cebu City, was on ce the fifth placer in the Philippine board of nursing exam. She went to the US in 1964 and became a nurse at a hospital in Chicago while she continued her studies in St. Mary of Nazareth Hospital and finished her graduate degree. Gabato, through her timeless commitment

as a health care professional has been honoured by Asian American groups in Las Vegas for her service to Nursing and Nurses in their community.

With almost a year in service now as one of the Board of Members of the Nevada State Board of Nursing, Gabato is very serious in representing and supporting her fellow Filipino nurses. Her aim is to inspire and push Filipino nurses to pursue their career path as a medical practitioner to gain higher ranks in different offices.

Although her term as member of the Nevada State Board of Nursing will end on October 31, 2011, Gabato, through her achievement, will still continue to protect and serve the people of Nevada and her fellow Filipinos nurses to further promote the Philippine excellence in the healthcare industry. ■