

NaFFAA sets priorities for 2009, redefines role...

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need to decentralize by shifting the focus from the national to the regional arena where the grass-roots activities are taking place." To this end, he proposed a revenue-sharing arrangement that allocates 80 percent of any monies raised to the regional. The board unanimously approved this policy change.

Political empowerment
Mindful of its core mission to empower Filipinos in America, the board moved decisively to form a political action committee. "We have to be politically savvy and build an infrastructure that allows us to endorse candidates for public office, raise funds and contribute to political campaigns," Macabenta explained. "It's this ability that gives NaFFAA greater political clout. But to comply with IRS rules, this for mal entity has to be separate from NaFFAA organizationally." A task force, headed by Region 1 (East Coast) Chair J.T. Mallonga, resolved to submit a report by the end of December, for immediate implementation early next year.

On a similar note, the impressive voter turnout by Filipino Americans in the last presidential elections prompted renewed support by NaFFAA to an on-going voter education and mobilization program. Gloria Caoile, FilVote co-chair, cited successful voter registration drives this year in Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Florida. Filipino young professionals, led by former NaFFAA National Youth Chair Dexter Ligot-Gordon, offered to share lessons from the Filipinos for Obama campaign, notably its field program in building a data base to raise money and mobilize electorally. Now called FilAmVote, this national non-partisan voter program is now headed by Merit Salud, a Democrat from New York, and Emraida Kiram, a Republican from Wisconsin. Gordon heads up FilAmVote's youth component. Noting that the 2010 Census

will soon be under way, Macabenta alerted NaFFAA officers to be actively engaged and ensure that Filipinos are not undercounted. "We are now 4 million strong in the U.S. today," he said. "It's critical that we are accurately counted so that underserved sectors in our community are properly recognized."

Coalition building
Macabenta reported to the board that NaFFAA recently rejoined the Greenlining Coalition, an alliance of over 50 mainstream organizations committed to social justice issues. "The basic ideology that unifies the coalition is the understanding that increasing the size of the pie for all communities makes more sense than fighting for crumbs," he noted. One program, co-sponsored recently by San Diego-based Mabuhay Alliance and NaFFAA, is foreclosure prevention training. "Being part of this coalition enables us not only to pursue economic advocacy issues but to also avail of Community Reinvestment Act funds," Macabenta said.

Ben de Guzman, newly-appointed NaFFAA permanent representative to the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCA-PA), emphasized the importance of "being at the table" with coalition partners, such as the Asian American Justice Center and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, particularly in influencing public policy. He cited advocacy for Filipino Veterans equity and immigration reform as examples. "We wouldn't have achieved significant gains in Congress without the support of these established civil rights organizations."

DeGuzman, who is also national coordinator for the National Alliance for Filipino Veterans Equity (NAFVE), credited coalition partners in the Asian Pacific American community for their valuable assistance in enlisting congressional co-sponsors for the equity bill. "When we re-launch our campaign next year, we will be in a stronger position because of the

relationships we have built with these highly-respected civil rights groups."

Leadership development
Looking towards the immediate future, the board affirmed its commitment to training youth and young professionals. Matteo Fernandez, a youth leader from Los Angeles, pointed out the need to provide a structure for young professionals. "Many of them are well-positioned in corporations and they can direct us to much-needed resources to fund our programs," he explained.

"NaFFAA is definitely not lacking in people with the skill, talent, resources, commitment and dedication required for national leadership," Macabenta said. "All they need are more opportunities to display these qualities. It is incumbent on the national leadership to get them more involved in national affairs."

Hosting the planning meeting, which was attended by more than 50 board members, observers and community leaders from NaFFAA's 12 regions, was Capital Region officers led by Nony Abrajano, Maurese Owens, Gloria Caoile and Bing Branigin. The Philippine Embassy offered the use of its facilities for a Friday evening reception and the all-day Saturday meeting.

"The synergy of these leaders who gathered this weekend to get NaFFAA moving forward is wonderful," said NaFFAA National Vice Chair Rozita Lee. "The spirit of 'Yes, We Can' is very encouraging." (reports from Bing Branigin and Jon Melegrito)

A Cappella



Philippine Embassy Minister and Consul Ariel Rodelas Penaranda, NaFFAA Vice Chair Rozita Lee, Young Professionals Chair of Region 9 Matteo Fernandez; National Chair Greg Macabenta, Young Professionals Vice Chair of Region 9 Charina Carrera, NaFFAA Region 8 Chair Socrates Inonog and Loida Dietz from Filipinas Magazine at a reception hosted by the Philippine Embassy on Nov 21.

by JON MELEGRITO

IT'S Saturday night, live, in the Springfield home of Ben and Gloria Caoile. The place is boisterous with raucous laughter and endless chatter. Feasting on crabs, 'lechon,' 'pancit' and 'adobo,' a rowdy bunch of revelers has converged in this quiet neighborhood, bent on letting their hair down.

Leading the charge is 69-year-old Greg Macabenta of Daly City, California. A veteran PR man, prolific writer of more than 200 Filipino movie scripts, publisher

of Filipinas Magazine and owner of Minority Media Services, Inc. (among many other titles), the newly-elected national chairman of NaFFAA is belting out songs tonight. The repertoire includes Tagalog and Visayan ballads, Negro Spirituals, Broadway hits and popular favorites.

The Karaoke machine is broken, which is just as well. This is not the time for solo performances. Singing a cappella is more in the "Yes We Can" spirit of the day. And with the chair-

man setting the tone, it didn't take long before everyone else piped in, with the more gifted tenors, baritones, altos and sopranos raising their voices with unbridled passion.

A capella. Passion. And the "Yes We Can" spirit. That about sums up a long day of serious discussion, sober deliberation and prompt resolution.

Meeting in the Philippine Embassy's Romulo Hall, the 30 NaFFAA board of officers and a

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