

Joy Rojas in Kansas

by JOSEPH PIMENTEL
AJPress

LOS ANGELES – THE text message read, "We are in Great Bend, Kansas, staying on highway 50 and 56."

She followed it with a phone call to this reporter.

"We've made it to Kansas," exclaimed Filipina marathoner Joy Rojas to the *Asian Journal* last Thursday July 9. "It's totally different running here than it was in Colorado. Kansas is flat and hot with lots of corn and wheat fields, lots of sun."

She says the Midwest sun gets as hot as Manila in the summer.

The 44-year-old Rojas is less than halfway from her goal of running across the United States of America.

Waking up at 6am everyday, Rojas has been running 30 to 35 miles a day since she began her Trans-USA run called Takbong Pangarap or Dream Run at the Eagle Rock Plaza in Los Angeles, California on May 10. She made a quick stop over in Las Vegas, Nevada where she was celebrated during Western Union Customer Appreciation Day on May 23 and another stopover at the Western Union headquarters in Denver, Colorado. Western Union is one of the sponsors of her Trans-USA run.

She says that she's on her way to reaching her goal of arriving at the Philippine Consulate in New York City on September 8.

So far, Rojas and her trainer, Mat Macabe, have run for more than 40 days now, crossed five states, jogged over 1,000 miles, and touched the lives of many people who see the two running on highways and streets across America.

While passing through Arizona, a couple saw Rojas and Macabe running. When they found out the reason for Rojas' run, they immediately invited the Filipina and her partner to their home for dinner. The same thing happened in Colorado. Rojas recalls how before reaching Denver, a Filipino man read the words "Can we ignite the



Filipino spirit across America?"

on the Western Union support vehicle. He then immediately introduced himself to Rojas and Macabe. After the day's run, the Filipino man came over to their hotel where he cooked them dinner consisting of elk and deer that the man had hunted.

"Can you believe that? All of these strangers that we meet everyday have been so kind and generous to us," said Rojas. "I'm a vegetarian but when he asked if I was eating elk and deer I said 'for you, I will.' You have to be a gracious guest."

Another time in Colorado, Rojas met a group of cyclists on the road like her but they were biking across the US from San Francisco to New Hampshire.

Rojas and the cyclists took pictures and wished each other well.

The experience has been so far so good, says Rojas.

Rojas also admits that the run sometimes is a bit unforgiving. In Colorado, she had to withstand the high altitude and steep roads that at times, required her to stop and walk but she contin-

ues to persevere.

Despite being tired at times after a long day's run, she says that by the time she wakes up the next morning, she feels refreshed and ready to go.

A survivor of tuberculosis, Rojas's is running for her beneficiaries: a Division of the Philippine Heart Center and the Anti-TB Program of the Inner Wheel Club of Quezon City, District 378

Rojas said that after Colorado, her run should be smooth as the flat plains of Kansas. ■

Bad news, good news on Guam jobs

THE bad news: As next year's scheduled relocation of the United States military base from Okinawa, Japan to Guam gives Filipinos seeking overseas employment hope, they may not get priority for construction jobs, a recruitment specialist said Sunday.

Although Filipinos are preferred in Guam, the huge unemployment situation in the US, particularly mainland-based construction workers, may get in the way of getting Filipinos hired for jobs created by the planned construction of various buildings and infrastructure in the new site of the US Marine and Air Force units, said Emmanuel Geslani.

Quoting Guam Governor Felix Camacho, he said construction workers in the US may compete with the prospective Filipino workers.

Among those that will be built are new barracks, dependents' housing, new roads, and infrastructure like electrical power, water facilities, waste treatment, commissary and other buildings necessary to accommodate the transfer and relocation of the additional 23,000 persons, he said.

He said the demand for construction workers for the Guam build-up will start by the first quarter of 2010, when the bids for the new US Marines headquarters will be awarded. Actual construction will start in July 2010 after all bids have been awarded. The 18-month project is scheduled for completion by 2012 for the total relocation of US military personnel from Okinawa by 2014.

At the same time, there are no still job orders approved by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, said Geslani.

He said the employment contract acceptable to both Guam labor officials and the POEA is still being finalized, although the basic issues have already been agreed on—the hourly wages start at \$12 and US labor laws will be followed.

Camacho was in the country last week and met with members and officials of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce, the Philippine Association of Service Exporters Inc. (Pasei), and the

Philippine Construction Association.

The good news

But once Guam is transformed into a major US military base in the Pacific, Filipino health care personnel will be in demand, the Guam governor said.

"Guam is substantially underserved in health care services. Filipino nurses who have passed the requisite US licensure examinations and Filipino doctors that have US board certifications are qualified to apply," the Guam official said.

Guam, which is only three hours away from the Philippines, will become home to 8,000 more US Marines and 15,000 more dependents starting 2012.

Actual demand for healthcare workers will start in 2012 when the relocation of the US Marines and their dependents will start so aspiring Filipino nurses and doctors can now prepare by taking the necessary US exams like NCLEX, CG-FNS, IELTS, and US Board certifications, Geslani said.

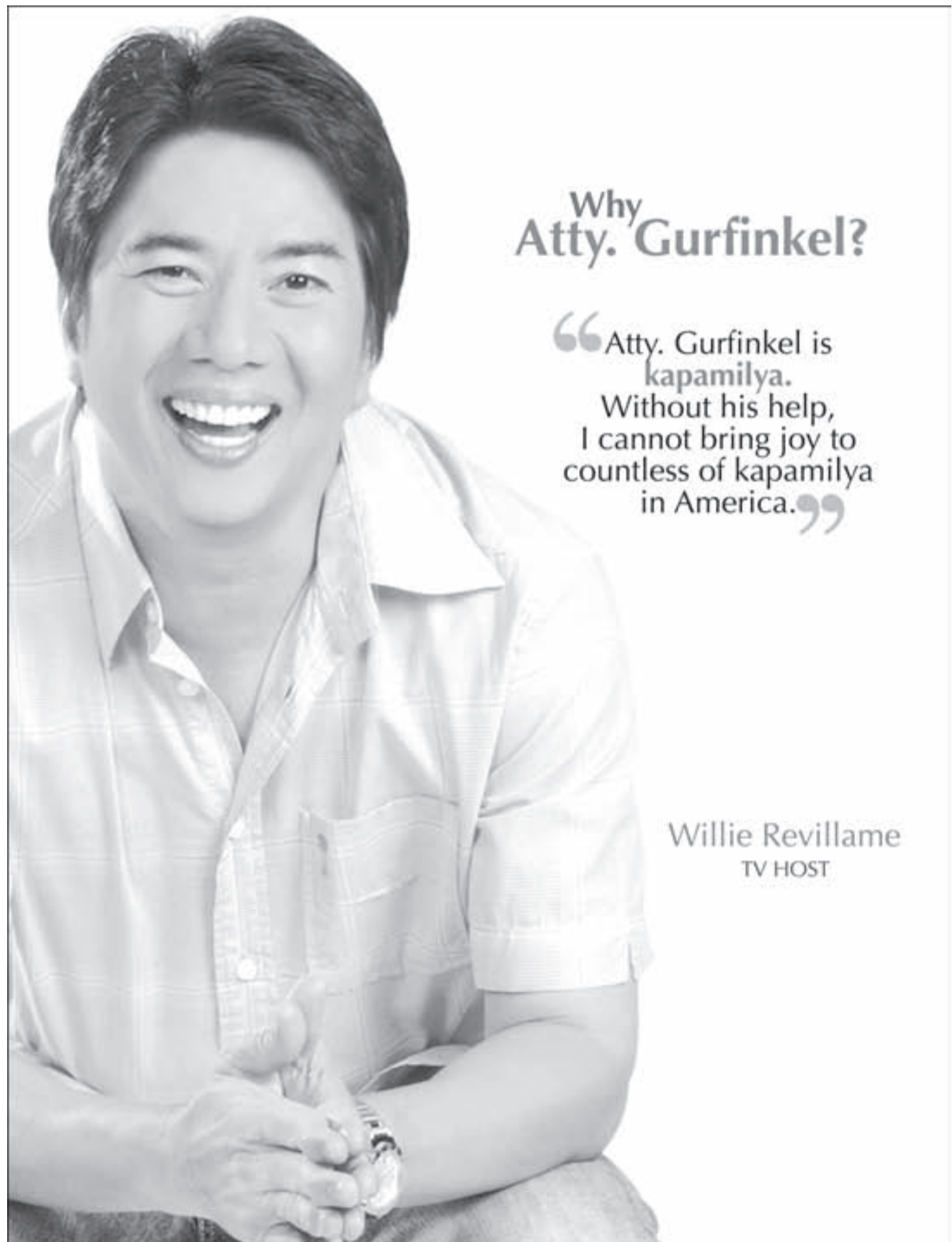
Medical technicians in radiology, cardio laboratories, and CT scan; occupational and physical therapists, as well as medical transcriptionists and medical administrative personnel will be needed to staff the expanded naval hospital in Guam, he said.

The US Department of Defense anticipates that the transfer would double the total patient capacity of the US Naval Hospital, now the primary medical provider for the 14,000 military members and their dependents in Guam.

The US Naval Hospital offers a broad band of medical services that include family practice, OB-GYN, pediatrics, general surgery, internal medicine, occupational health and preventive medicine, physical therapy, health promotions, and social work services.

Japan will fund \$8 billion of the \$12-billion move, the rest by the US.

Altogether, Geslani said, the relocation of the US military base is expected to generate 20,000 jobs. (*Inquirer.net*)



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