

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Ten outstanding Filipinos honored at Fiesta Gala event

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Filipino theater superstar Stephanie Reese delighted audience at the June 20th Fiesta Filipino gala, not only with classic Broadway numbers but also with an operatic rendition of Bicolano song Sarung Banggi.



The Filipiniana Dance Company added glitz to the already glamorous gala event which was the culmination of the 2009 Fiesta Filipino festivities in Las Vegas.

AJPress photos by Robert Macabagdal

office of minority health advisory board. Belen Gabato is the first Asian member of the NV State Board of Nursing. Educator Francesca Aroc Ridgley, meanwhile, was lauded for her contribution in the field of education.

Medical professionals Dr. Benito Calderon and Luzviminda Banaria were lauded for their charitable involvement in the healthcare of Filipinos in the city. Dr. Calderon is popular for being the physician of the "un-insured"—or those who do not have medical insurance. Banaria, a registered nurse, helped set up the Las Vegas Philippine Medical Mission, a non-profit agency that organizes medical missions to indigent communi-

ties in the Philippines.

Other awardees who were recognized last June 20th were Myrna Alforque and Violeta Horn. Alforque is the founder of the Filipiniana Cultural & Arts Foundation, a gathering of men and women who perform traditional Philippine folk dances both at Filipino and mainstream gatherings in Las Vegas.

Horn, a CPA by profession, is a member of the board of trustees of The Lions HealthFirst Foundation. The charity maintains a preventive screening program that aims to reduce the rate of stroke, heart attacks and cancer among people.

Meanwhile, a posthumous award was given to Dr. Rena

Nora for her contribution to the medical field in Las Vegas. The award was received by her daughter Las Vegas Family Court Judge Cheryl Nora Moss.

All the awardees were given the recognition during the first-ever red carpet event for Filipinos in this city. The gala event is part of the first annual Fiesta Filipino festivities in this city.

The 2009 Fiesta Filipino festivity in Las Vegas has been the biggest celebration in this city to commemorate the 111th Independence Day of the Philippines. The Philippines marks its Independence Day on June 12th. NaFFAA NV aims to hold the Las Vegas event annually every month of June.

Pres. Arroyo lauds overseas Pinoys...

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nal Affairs adviser and FIL-USA founder Edgardo Pamintuan.

Ambassador Willy Gaa and Consul General Mary Jo Bernardo Aragon, and Philippine Tourism Director Annie Cuevas, and Deputy Director Manny Ilagan were also in attendance at the reception.

Arroyo said that the Philippines, like China and Vietnam had done well, despite the recession because it had taken steps to safeguard its long-term priorities. "We took the necessary steps in the past," Arroyo said. "We are also working toward a balanced budget, and we believe that our government should live within its means." Arroyo said that her government could have balanced the budget last year, "but the recession in America—where you live—the biggest market in the world, had impacted our budget," she said.

"The government must live within its means, as the normal Filipino does," Arroyo stressed. "Now more than ever, you and the overseas Filipino workers are keeping our country resilient. Through your unswerving dedication and your care, you are our far-flung heroes and the greatest contributors towards our nation's resiliency."

"From Asia to North America to Europe, you are great patriots and great family men and

women, and we envy all of you," Arroyo added.

The President said that everyone has a part to play to see the country through these difficult economic times. "It is important that the next generation will have all the opportunities. "Let us all remain hopeful and optimistic that the global economy will recover."

She said that her government would remain vigilant in keeping recession away from its shores. "What I would like to ask FIL-USA and the all the Filipinos here is to continue to be patriots so that we—and the members of Congress who are here today—can keep working to keep the economy steady," Arroyo said.

She said that this optimism about the future is indicated in surveys after surveys. "So I will ask FIL-USA to empower the Filipinos here to keep the fire of optimism of our people. The Philippines has the biggest numbers of overseas workers in the world. Let us not forget that there are 8 million Filipinos living abroad, but you send two-thirds of our revenues, and that 5 million of you are in the United States. Tuloy pa rin ang tulong ninyo sa Pilipinas (You continue to help the Philippines). So with Filipinos in the United States, especially here in the Los Angeles;

with your continuing support us, we can say that our country is in good hands."

FIL-USA was organized in about a month, according to Secretary Edgardo Pamintuan. It has chapters in San Francisco, San Diego, Los Angeles, Houston, Chicago, New York, and Washington DC "We established this organization to show to the Filipino people—that aside from the negative views that we are getting—we made our own presentations of the infrastructure projects and the social services that the President's administration provided for the first time in 30 years," Secretary Pamintuan told *Asian Journal*.

"The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other financial institutions attested that the Philippines generated a positive GDP during the last 30 years for the first time," Pamintuan said. "We had economic growth. It is not negative, unlike other countries. All the (other Asian countries) had negative growth, except China and Vietnam (and the Philippines)."

Pamintuan is in charge of the office of the adviser on internal affairs. He championed the Luzon urban beltway, and maintains all infrastructure projects that link major roads from the Calabarzon region to Metro Manila. ■

NV Family court judge says Filipino presence...

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tion for their various professional, cultural and leadership contributions to this city.

The gala night was the conclusion of the Fiesta Filipino celebration to commemorate the 111th Philippine Independence. The two-part event was organized by the National Federation of Filipino American Associations, Nevada Chapter (NaFFAA NV).

"Thank you to NaFFAA for their hard work and successful efforts to make this year memorable. It makes me feel proud to be Filipino American," Judge Moss said.

Close to 5,000 Filipinos along with their friends and family flocked to the Sammy Davis Festival Plaza in Las Vegas for the first part of the festivities. Aside from local Las Vegas residents, the whole day event was also attended by visitors from neighboring cities in California, Arizona and Utah.

There are more than 100,000 Filipinos living in Las Vegas, making these residents one of the largest cultural groups in the city. But this is the first time that Filipinos grouped together to celebrate the Philippine Independence day with a grand festivity.

NaFFAA NV had said it aims to hold the Fiesta Filipino event in Las Vegas annually every month of June. This is expected to unite Filipinos to make them "more visible" in the community, it added.

Last month, Filipinos were honored by Las Vegas mayor Oscar Goodman during the Asian American Heritage month celebration. NaFFAA NV was also recognized by for empowering the Filipino-American community in Las Vegas.

Judge Moss, in her statement, noted that the first annual Fiesta Filipino celebration was a good tool in bringing all Filipinos in Las Vegas together.

"Our cultural heritage and distinctiveness as Filipino-Americans makes us a strong, close-knit group because we value our family and our friendships," she said

Since 2001, Judge Moss has been serving at Eighth Judicial District Court of Clark County, Nevada which has jurisdiction over the city of Las Vegas. Prior to this post, she was elected in 2000 in the Family Division of the District Court. She is an alumna of George Washington University and the Columbus School of Law in Washington, DC.

While born and schooled in the US, Judge Moss' parents are both Filipinos. They were both Philippine-educated physicians who were also known in Las Vegas for their professional contributions.

In fact, her mother, Dr. Rena Nora, was one of the national pioneers in the field of problem gambling. She held the post of Chief of Psychiatry in the VA Health Care System both in New Jersey and Las Vegas, Nevada. Before her death last year, Dr. Nora was clinical professor in the Department of Psychiatry of the University of Nevada - School of Medicine. She was also the Director of the outpatient program for pathological gambling at the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System in Las Vegas. ■

Immigration agency says backlog virtually gone

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Petitions that require more evaluation or interaction with other agencies are not included in the FBI name check backlog count, immigration officials said. Currently, some 6,000 cases are pending with Citizenship and Immigration Services, including some in which the application was filed several years ago, Aytes said.

"They are being looked at, they don't just sit on a shelf," said Gregory Smith, the agency's assistant director for national security and records verification directorate.

The volume of pending FBI name checks peaked in November 2007 when there were about 350,000 pending cases. At the time, more than half had been waiting for more than three months and a large number had been pending for

more than a year, Aytes said.

In April 2008, the two agencies established milestones and priorities for the name checks. The goals required processing all name checks pending more than three years by May 2008, those pending more than two years by July 2008, and requests pending more than one year by November 2008.

A government audit issued in June 2008 found the FBI had been using old technology and workers without enough training to do security checks.

That same month, a group of Muslim immigrants seeking US citizenship in Missouri filed a federal class-action lawsuit claiming they had been made to wait for months or years because of slow background checks. (AP)

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