



Our History

The Council of United Filipino Organizations of Tidewater, Virginia Inc.

By Lydia A. Villanueva, THE BANNER Editor

The passing of the Immigration Act in 1963, saw a surge of Filipino immigrants to the USA when the 100 per year quota was increased to 20,000 per year. This 4th wave of Filipino immigration to the USA included mainly professionals and military recruits (Navy, Marine, Army, Air Force, Coast Guard). The naval bases and other bases in Hampton Roads brought many families and before long, regional organizations, small clubs, and professional organizations were formed. Uniting these local organizations was the brainchild of two outstanding leaders-Coring Padilla, president of the Filipino Women's club and Mario Gamboa, USN, president of the Batangas Association. In 1974, they were later joined by Dr. Manuel Hipol, Commander, Medical Corps, US Navy, a Radiologist assigned at Portsmouth Naval Regional Medical Center and first president of the United Ilocano Association of Tidewater, Felimon Magpoc, Jr., president of the Bataan Association, Pablo Padilla, USN, president of the Seafarers (Filipino Veterans) and Jess Quirimit, president of the Pampango Language Club.

On January 16, 1976 these presidents with their respective members gathered at the Little Creek Amphibious Base Meeting House for a meeting presided by Dr. Norma Magpoc and elected the following officers: Dr. Manuel Hipol-Chairman, Col. Leon Punsalan, USA -Vice Chairman, Araceli Marcial-Secretary, Mario Gamboa-Treasurer, Jess Querimit-Auditor, Philippine Embassy, Washington DC and Norma Magpoc-PRO. They named the organization, Council of United Filipino Organizations of Tidewater. Colonel Leon Punsalan chaired the committee that drafted the Constitution and By-Laws. The officers were inducted by Consul General Leonides Caday, Philippine Embassy, Washington, DC. The Council primary mission as proposed by Dr. Hipol, was to build a place to preserve and showcase our culture, traditions and heritage for our children and the present and the future generations.

Mario Gamboa became the 2nd chairman in 1977 and under his stewardship, the City of Norfolk proclaimed the week of June 12th as Philippine Week to commemorate the Philippine Independence from Spain. In an emotional flag raising ceremony in front of the Norfolk City Hall, the Philippine flag flew with the American flag side by side for the whole week. This year the Filipino American Golf

Association was brought in to join the CUFOT by its president, Mario Gamboa and the Zambales Association by its president, Dr. Guillermo Acierto.

1978 brought back Manuel Hipol as the 3rd chairman who proposed the Mrs. Philippines of VA popularity contest as a fund raiser for the PCCVA. Mrs. Lilia Paras was crowned as the first Mrs. Philippines of VA in the Virginia Beach Civic Center (the Dome). Her Royal Court were; Mrs. Binang Reyes, Mrs. Jean Baladad and Mrs. Brigida Monson. These pageanties were to become the annual major fundraisers for the Philippine Cultural Center of VA Building Fund for the past 36 years.

In 1979, the Council of United Filipino Organizations was incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

In September 1979 a small brick ranch house on a 2.3 acre lot on Baxter Road was acquired with a \$75,000 loan. The house was upgraded by volunteer craftsmen making it functional as a place for meetings, youth and Senior citizens gathering place for a variety of activities, and rented out for private parties. A big sign Philippine Cultural Center was nailed on the frontage of the house. The Cavite Associations and the Cultural Tour Society joined CUFOT this year.

In 1980, Crisanto Romero, president of the Filipino American Veterans, became the 4th Chairman. For the first time, Filipino American Veterans led the Norfolk Memorial Day parade. With them, was a float that carried Mrs. Nellie Dabu, the reigning Mrs. Philippines and Jennifer Magpoc, the reigning Little Miss Philippines.

In 1981, Samahang Tagalog joined CUFOT. This year, an Annual Cultural Night was started wherein Organizations competed for Best Cultural presentation. This show lasted for a few years. A Youth Division was formed in September 1981 which provided educational programs and folkdance clinic chaired by Rose Daria. The Senior Citizens Health and Preventive Care program was formed and co chaired by Venus Tomaneng and Ciony Gamboa. Salute to the Graduates became a project of Dr. Aleli Romero. A "CUFOT Newsletter" which eventually named the "THE BANNER" was published with Des Del Rosario as its first Editor. Its publication was erratic and far in between publications for the next 12 years. The FIL Am Bayanihan and the UIAT Senior Citizens Group joined CUFOT.

In April 1982, the IRS gave CUFOT, INC its 501 C3 tax exempt status. Virgilio Madera became the 5th Chairman in 1983. A civil engineer employed by the City of Virginia Beach. He facilitated the sewer and water connections of the Baxter property. He became a custodian in residence at the Center. The 1983 Mrs. Philippines contest that was won by Mrs. Sol Montilla generated the 46,000 cash that paid for the one acre lot next door.

In 1984, Manuel Hipol was again elected as the 6th Chairman. The Mrs. Philippines and Court Society was formed by Dr. Manny Hipol & Mrs. Rose Daria with Mrs. Pilar Flores as Chairperson. This group was to be the coordinator of the Mrs. Philippines contest.

Another property with a small house, on a 0.5 acre lot adjacent to the CUFOT was put up for sale. The Council could not afford but the Hipol and Dabu families bought it to ensure that this property would eventually be owned by CUFOT, which it did in 1991 at its original price without interest to the lenders.

In 1985 Conrado Dabu, president of the Pampango Language Club became the 7th Chairman. Meanwhile, Coring Padilla has been doing the leg work in following the Building Permit application, the Site Plan, rezoning and other City requirements. The Filipino Women's Club of Tidewater Dance Troupe with Mrs. Rose Daria as Director was the first organized group followed by the United Ilocano Association of Tidewater Youth Dance Troupe. Both received grants from the City of Norfolk through its membership with the CUFOT, Inc.

On October 11, 1987, Dr. Manny took a flight to Hackensack, NJ to receive one of the traveling statues of San Lorenzo Ruiz from Rev. Advincula Diaz. Dr. Hipol brought the 3 ft tall wooden Statue to the old Cultural Center where a crowd waited to start a 9 day Novena that was to culminate on October 18, 1987, the day that San Lorenzo Ruiz was canonized by Pope John Paul II. The mass was celebrated at St. Mathews Catholic Church. This became an annual religious activity every October commemorating his canonization. 2012 celebrated his 25th Anniversary at the PCCVA.

In 1989 Coring Padilla, the persistent and optimistic chairperson of the Fundraising Committee was elected 8th Chairperson. She was the initiator of the Magic 10 Pledge Plan, a pyramid type of donor solicitation.

In 1991, Dick Dabu returned as the 9th Chairman. The three lots of almost 3 acres were rezoned as O2-Commercial Office and in June 1993, the site plan building permit and other documents were completed. The assessed value of the property was \$1.2 M.

On August 21, 1993 a lavish ground breaking ceremony was held. A “time capsule” was buried in the first foundation hole of future building. The ground breaking did not bring big donations nor did it bring additional guarantors. The building Permit had to be extended several times. CUFOT membership dwindled, left discouraged and demoralized. But the leadership of the Council persevered, steadfast and work harder.

In 1994, through the efforts of Delegate Frank Wagner and his legal aide Ron Villanueva, the Baxter Road property was exempted from Real Estate and Property Taxes.

In February 1997, a restructuring of CUFOT organizational chart included an Executive Board to manage other responsibilities of the Cultural Center. This was suggested by Atty Joey Villanueva, the first Kahirup President. The first officers were Dr. Aleli Romero-Executive President, Joey Villanueva-Executive Vice President, Lita Sison- Secretary and Rosa Blanco-Treasurer.

In September 1997, Rose Daria regrouped the Performing Arts Committee of the Youth Division of the Council. Luz Tolentino and Aida Fanugao were the volunteer dance instructors. The program was a success. The Youth Dancers were invited to perform in schools, hospitals, nursing homes, historical events and more.

In October 1997, an “Open House” displayed the documents that included the Lot purchases, Site Plans, Zoning, Financial Reports, Feasibility Studies and more. These documents did not produce the needed guarantors. On that same month, encouraged and motivated by her brother Sid deVera, Dr. Rose deVera Hipol came on board with the sole purpose of getting the guarantors as required by the Bank of the Commonwealth before the Construction Loan was to be released. She initiated the weekly evening dinner meetings of prospective guarantors at her home. Mr. & Mrs. Dick Dabu and Mr. & Mrs. Roger Guerrero also hosted dinner meetings. On March 15, 1998, thirty-two (32) families signed up as guarantors and the bank finally released \$988,500 at 7.375% interest fixed for 25 years. Campaign efforts to solicit more donations became intensified. Campaign 500 led by Dr. Aleli Romero, the Millennium Tree directed by Venus Tomaneng and Rose Hipol. The \$2000 challenge, Magic 10, CUFOT Foundation Pledges, Checkomatic and a variety of small incentives like Tapsilog. Included in these sources of revenues were the \$20,000 donation (for Educational Fund) from the Philippine Medical Association of Southeastern VA, through its president Dr. Rose deVera-Hipol and a \$70,000 grant from the Governor’s office for Infrastructural Development.

A second ground breaking ceremony was held on March 8, 1999 and the construction of the Philippine Cultural Center of VA was about to begin. Useable equipment and furnishings from the two small houses were placed in storage by several teary eyed volunteers who called this day, “Demolition

Party". On March 23, 1999 bulldozers reduced the two small houses to rubbles ending an era of strife. Mr. David Gatling, the builder submitted a time-line towards completion of the long awaited Cultural Center.

There was a snag that delayed the construction. The heir of the adjacent property questioned the sale and demanded the original check would prove the purchase. But the check could not be found. There was a frantic search in the rented storage space. The record was found in a container covered with the folded banner of San Lorenzo Ruiz. This was one of the few incidents attributed to the "miracles" of San Lorenzo during the construction.

The Chairman of the Construction was overseen by Dr. Manny Hipol and Co-Chairman – Mr. Dick Dabu. Together were several volunteers – Atty John Greenside, Architects Sid Paulmino and Rollie Tiamsen, Engineers Arnel Lavarias and Omar San Antonio, the Espiritu brothers, Jess, Jun, Aldy, Boy, Wilson and Edward Greenside.

On June 24, 2000, the dream became a reality... a Philippine Cultural Center of VA built by the Filipino Community without government subsidy. At the Inaugural, the Guest of Honor, Ambassador Ernesto Maceda said that this Center was the biggest and most beautiful Philippine Center in the USA. The 100 x 140 prefabricated red brick building with a 1100 theater sitting capacity or 600 table sitting capacity in its ballroom and a paved parking lot for 187 cars looked majestic after over 23 years on the drawing board.

In deference to Dick Dabu who had an aggregate of 12 ½ years as Chairman, the biennial election was postponed to July 23, 2000. Dr. Manuel Hipol was again elected 9th Chairman, Coring Padilla - Vice Chairman, Sid Barrera-Executive President, Merla Marcelo- Executive Vice-President, Nita Cacanindin-Secretary & Rosa Blanco – Treasurer. Subsequent elections in 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012 reelected most of the obviously dedicated and loyal incumbents headed by Chairman Manuel Hipol.

With a deteriorating economy, a loan modification was made with the Bank of the Commonwealth. The 7.375% interest was reduced to 6%. Other organizations that joined CUFOT included The Baguio Fil-Am, Filipiniana of VA, National Federation of Filipino American Association, Philippine Nurses Association of Hampton Roads, Quezonians, Circulo Tarlaqueno and Zambales Association. Membership went to an all time high of 24 from an all time low of 10 members. There are benefits accorded to members like free or discounted rentals. They can use the IRS Tax-Exempt 501 (C-3) for their Fundraising projects. Also, the Center has been a no-rent venue for many humanitarian fund raising events regardless of membership in CUFOT. Administration and Beautification of the Center was designated as a job of the Executive Officer. Garden islands bloom along the parking lot. Presently, Mr. George Daria, USN Retired, is the Executive President for the past 8 years assisted by a volunteer handyman, Phil Diaz USN Retired. On the front of the building is a waterfall cascading into a fish pond and a Veterans Memorial Garden was built and being maintained by the Filipino American Veterans of Hampton Roads.

The CUFOT Executive Board has been meeting once a week, while the Board of Directors composed of delegates from member organizations has continued to meet once a month. Through the able Chairmanship of Mrs. Levy Paler RN, of the Constitution and By-Laws some articles has been amended and ratified, that is suitable to the needs of the CUFOT, the Center and the community. Venus Tomaneng RN, Vice Chairman is a great asset being the chairman of the Fundraising Committee. Rosa Blanco, Treasurer for over 20 years. Under the eagle eyes of our treasurer for detail, as well as her competent financial control, we are healthy in our finances and treasury. Nita Cacanindin RN, First Executive Vice President helped in the management of volunteers and foreseeing the PCC VA contracts. Cely Diaz RN, and Madonna Mendoza are our Secretaries are worthy to be mentioned, since without their help our records and documentations will experience hardships. Tricia Orpilla is our Third Vice President.

She is our bridge with the Young Fil-AM and Young Professionals. Roy Estaris PRO, takes care of updating the newsletter and other media pertaining to the PCC and Fil-Am Community.

The Board of Trustees serves as an organization to oversee the function of CUFOT and they ensure that the core values and purposes of the council are reflected in its day to day operation, they have elected Sid Barrera as their Chairman. The lady that holds the power of the pen of the Council is none other than, Mrs. Lydia Villanueva, a retired Registered Nurse. She is the Editor of THE BANNER Newsletter for more than 20 years! She continues to inform our community with news update, individual accomplishment and recognition, as well as upcoming events of the CUFOT member organizations. The technical and graphic talent of one of the elected Board of Directors at Large was tapped and challenged. Arnie Florendo accepted the difficult task of enhancing the CUFOT seal and its symbolic meanings and archived the historical documents of the council. He also redesigned the letterhead of the CUFOT Banner Newsletter, as well as the layout and composition of this 35th “Jade” Anniversary journal, making it worth keeping. There has been only one paid building manager assisted by an all Volunteer Corps who are considered the “UNSUNG HEROES” of the Philippine Cultural Center of VA.

Some of the achievements, recognitions and awards bestowed to the Council of United Filipino Organizations of Tidewater are the following:

- 1.** This is the only Philippine Cultural Center in America that is purely owned by the Fil-American community. There was no construction grant received from the Federal, State nor the City or from foundations.
- 2.** The General Assembly in Richmond, Virginia passed and approved a House Resolution 220, stating that June 12, 2008, the Philippine Independence Day, and thereafter, shall be an Official Day in Virginia.
- 3.** It was recognized as a Historical Building in Virginia being the only Philippine Cultural Center in the Commonwealth by the Historical Building Committee
- 4.** The prestigious Genny Lopez Jr. ABS-CBN Bayaning Pilipino Awards 2009 was won by the Council among all the thousands of Fil-Am organizations in America. Such award was given to an organization that serves the real spirit of service to the community, the USA & the Philippines.
- 5.** On July 27, 2000, The Presidential Citation for Community Development was conferred by Pres. Joseph Estrada, Philippine President to the Council’s PCCVA project.
- 6.** On July 31, 2012, the Association of Philippine Physicians in America, awarded the PCCVA as the Best Philippine Cultural Center in the Nation, for not only the biggest, but the many humanitarian, educational, economic, cultural, religious services, political and many more.
- 7.** There were seven (7) Members of the Council that were recipient of the prestigious award, the Twenty Outstanding Filipino Awards in America and globally for their unwavering dedication, volunteerism and skills to the Center and the community.
- 8.** The School of Creative and Performing Arts (SCAPA), whose primary mission is to preserve and perpetuate our beautiful culture and traditions within the walls of the center.

Lastly, after 13 years, the Philippine Cultural Center of VA Construction Loan of **\$988,500**, payable in **25 years**. As of November 2013, the mortgage loan balance has been reduced to **\$77,999.85**. The assess value of the property, both structure and land is **2.2 million dollars**.

To the Filipino Americans in Virginia Beach and Hampton Roads, the Philippine Cultural Center of Virginia is the icon of Filipino Unity, where history begins. It is OUR Pride and a Legacy of the simple, hard working Filipino immigrant families that came to America to realize their DREAMS.

MABUHAY !