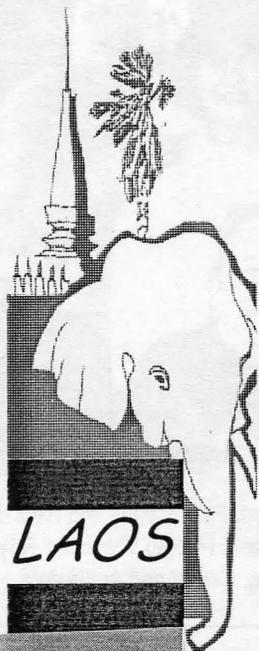


MEKONG

CIRCLE INTERNATIONAL

AUGUST 2003



Welcome to the Mekong Circle 2004 Reunion newsletter. *This will be the first issue of more newsletters to come between now and our August 2004 reunion. Its publication continues the practice that we started for our New York 2002 reunion to keep you posted regularly on the details of this event. To start with, our members have held "mini-reunions" of their own, to begin generating enthusiasm (translation: attendance) in 2004. These gatherings were held in Chicago, Los Angeles, New Jersey, New York and Manila (see details inside).*

CHICAGO REUNION COMMITTEE FORMED

Chosen to be the next site during the August 2002 New York reunion, Illinois wasted no time to get going. A core group of the planning committee got together September 28, 2002 at the residence of Reunion Chairman Pete Paluay and wife Edith in Zion, a suburb of Chicago. In attendance: Dicknoi and Lily Abad (Chicago), Raul and Puring de Jesus, together with son Anthony (Wisconsin), Joe and Lina Luna (Ohio), Henry and Dolly Nano (Chicago), Louie and Gladys Tabano (Chicago) and Linda Masibay (Chicago).

The full membership of the committee can be found in our website (www.mekongcircle.org) where a new section has been created devoted exclusively to the Chicago reunion. To view all the names, click on "Reunion 2004". From California to New York, Canada to the Philippines, the Committee members have a large part of our planet covered. They together with their second and third generations in tow should already compose a sizable participation.

Here is the tentative program:

Aug. 6, 2004 Friday: Registration; welcome "baci"; social-cultural events; buffet dinner

Aug. 7, 2004 Saturday: Tours; buffet lunch for second generation members; Board meeting; dinner-dance

Aug. 8, 2004 Sunday: Mass and brunch.

Venue for most of the events is the Hyatt Regency in downtown Chicago.

Registration fee is \$100 per person (Bob and Asil Monserrat with Lydia Palma, all from Washington State are the first registrants together with Tony & Gina Liwag of Ohio -- and all hoping for a prize. Lydia won a prize as New York's first registrant.

A larger group convened for the Committee's second meeting April 26, 2003 at the Abad residence in Chicago. Also joining them from Illinois are former OB Lao nurses Chantalom Pongmalay with husband Phoxay and Rabieb Vilayhong Roy (see photo next page for participants).

Simultaneous telephone conference calls, previously arranged, were made during the meeting to members in Los Angeles (Jun and Claire Ilustrisimo; Fidel and Wilma Padayao; Pol Custodio; Manding and Cecile Datu; and in San Francisco, Bik and Baby Marquez and Angie Maralit; from New York, Pete Fuentecilla spoke for the East Coast members).

Highlights of the meeting and conference call: estimates of registrants from each region; solicitation of seed money (\$3,050 donations collected so far); souvenir program advertising rates; invitations to Chicago-based dignitaries and Philippine Embassy Laos officials; Philippine projects that Mekong can help sponsor; a reunion newsletter; a "photo wall" to be displayed at the hotel; reunion graphic designs; fund raising projects.

Named coordinators among the Mekong Circle groups are Fidel Padayao and Romy Pestanas for USAID; Jun Ilustrisimo and Fred Lagaya for Air America; Pete Tabor and Ernie Felix for ECCOIL and Ruben Layug for Continental Air Services.

Red "Young-at-Heart" del Rosario (New Jersey) will provide 1950-era oldies music and arrange a karaoke set. But he won't sing along.

Keep
these
dates
open
for our
next
reunion:

August
6, 7 & 8
2004

Chicago,
Illinois
USA



April 26, 2003: Chicago Reunion Committee at their planning meeting in the residence of Lily & Dicknoi Abad in Chicago. Seated, Pete Paluay and Raul de Jesus. Standing: Louie Tabano, Lily Abad, Ernie de los Reyes, Henry Nano, Dolly Nano, Linda Masibay, Lina Luna, Gladys Tabano, Rabieb Vilayhong-Roy, Chanthalom Pongmalay, Offie de los Reyes and Myrna Garcia. Not in photo: Edith Paluay, Jocee Nantes, Tony and Gina Liwag, Cornel and Angie dela Pena, Joe Luna, Dick Abad, Steve Garcia and Puring de Jesus.

OUR MEKONG WEBSITE: TWO YEARS OF FORGING LINKS

On July 10, 2003, www.mekongcircle.org marked its second year in cyberspace. During that time it was visited 6,475 times, according to our program counter.

Another measure is the number of members (and non-members) who have signed the guestbook and took the time to leave their thoughts. Fifty one did - representing not only Mekong members from OB, ECCOIL, USAID, Air America, Continental Air -- but also sons and daughters, and others who stumbled into it, and were pleasantly surprised and deeply touched such a website existed. Go and sample their comments by clicking on "Online Community" on our home page, then clicking on "View Guestbook."

Here's one from Noi Kosila, the daughter of former OB Lao nurses, now living in Denver, Colorado who came to the US as an infant with her refugee parents: "My father recently received information about your organization and made me aware of it. Both my parents and my aunt had graduated from the nursing school in Vientiane (I'm not sure what year). I am interested in follow-

ing in my parents' footsteps and will be attending nursing school next year. I am excited to hear about your organization, for my goal is to return to Laos and hopefully help improve the healthcare."

Here's another from Clarence Acacio formerly of USAID, from Austin, Texas : "The Mekong Circle website is the best thing that ever happened to us, ex-Laos workers. I have met good old friends whom I thought I would never see again. This website made the world smaller, once again, in that it is now just a phone call or email away to those people with whom we shared camaraderie, and together we laughed our hearts out."

Read more at the site.

Apart from the standard obituaries and member news that association websites are expected to post, we have expanded our website's scope. Descriptions of the historic "Balik-Laos" journey and a short history of the OB School of Nursing are examples (together with photos) of these efforts. We invite members to submit their own memoirs.

Now here's a pitch for the Chicago reunion: Want to pictorially savor once again the reunion memories of San Francisco 2000 and New York 2002? Click on "Photos" on our Home Page. View them. Then before the feelings dissipate, pull out the registration form from this Newsletter, fill out and mail.

June 22, 2003: Los Angeles chapter meeting (below) at the residence of Cecile and Manding Datu. The Iskolar Ng Mekong and the Laos medical mission were discussed. Chapter officers elected: Tacing Atienza, secretary; Tony Atienza, treasurer. Headquarters: the Datu residence in West Covina, California



Front row, from left: Sivilay Sivongxay, Manding Datu, Jun Ilustrisimo. Middle row: Cecile Datu, Lydia Reyes, Carning Aguilar, Gigi Aguilar, Racquel Pestanas, Tacing Atienza, Claire Ilustrisimo, Bonchuay Orense, Lucero Ilustrisimo. Back row: Pol Custodio, Watana Panutai, Frank Saluna, Tomiko Saluna, Celso Orense, Rod Reyes, Romy Pestanas, Tony Atienza. Not in photo: Jake & Esther Demiar, Adoring and Lito Gomez, Josie Flores.

JUNE 9, 2003: A RESOLVE TO PROMOTE MEKONG PROJECTS

Mekong Circle Board Directors Fred Mendoza (based in Quezon City) and Raul de Jesus (of Wisconsin, on a vacation visit to the Philippines) paid a courtesy call on newly appointed Philippine Ambassador Antonio Chua in his Manila office after his appointment. Briefed on Mekong Circle activities, he said he will work to get the medical mission off the ground when he gets to Laos. Fred and Raul extended to the Ambassador Mekong's full support in fostering Lao-Philippine friendly relations.



From left, Raul de Jesus, Ambassador Chua, an unidentified employee of Mr. Chua, Fred Mendoza and Anthony de Jesus, son of Raul. The Ambassador is expected to arrive in Vientiane in August.

U P D A T E S

MEDICAL MISSION TO LAOS

History-making events do not always move fast, we are finding out. Take the case of this project. It was presented to the membership at our August 2002 reunion and passed by the Board. On November 7, the Lao Minister of Health, at a courtesy call by a Mekong Circle "Balik-Laos" party in his Vientiane office, verbally invited Operation Brotherhood to resume its medical program in Laos that ended in 1975. A 2-week survey in Laos by former OB Pete Fuentecilla that same month became the basis for the proposal submitted to the Minister in March 2003. Philippine Ambassador Mario Galman's untimely death in April left the proposal in limbo. He had agreed to follow it up and to seek financial sponsors among foreign aid agencies in Laos.

NEW PHILIPPINE AMBASSADOR

That task now falls on newly appointed head of mission to Laos Antonio Cabangon Chua who will take office this month.

He heads a group of companies headquartered in Makati with interests in health care, media, life insurance, banking, a car dealership, and a radio

station. Ambassador Chua will bring expertise in business that will be needed to sustain the viability of long-term projects.

ISKOLARS NG MEKONG

Another project endorsed at the New York reunion will fund the college education of several poor students in Manila. We have found a suitable recipient organization -- The House of Refuge Foundation - - an orphanage with some 60 youths, established in 1986 by a church group and licensed by the Philippine Department of Social Welfare & Development. Mekong Circle members have donated enough money to finance three students for four years. A little more donations from you and a fourth student can join in. Thanks to the generosity of East Coast members Marie Aguilos, Conse Sotio, Cora and Tony Sazon, Red and Edith del Rosario; California members Bik and Anita Marquez, Fenny and Tony Victa; Wisconsin members Puring and Raul de Jesus; and Chabeng Fajardo-Swift of Hawaii. Los Angeles collected cash donations from their June 22 meeting.

Donors can write out checks to Mekong Circle International (note it as "Iskolars Ng Mekong) and send to Red del Rosario at 1129 Heartwood Drive

Drive, Cherry Hill NJ 08003 (email:delrosario1129@yahoo.com). Donations are tax deductible.

BALIK-LAOS: ANOTHER RETURN

We learned that former OB and USAID agriculturist Felix Valera and wife Nilda took a swing last December through Southeast Asia --Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. They follow in the footsteps of a group of 17 Filipinos and Lao from the USA, Canada and the Philippines, all former workers in Laos, who spent Nov. 4 to 8, 2002 in Vientiane. For them and the Valeras, this journey was their first return to Laos after more than three decades.

Balik-Laos was conceived by the late Ambassador Mario Galman to renew ties between Filipinos and Lao that were cut off in 1975 when all Filipinos then working in Laos had to leave after a new Communist government took over. The Lao government backed the program which will culminate in 2005, marking 50 years of Philippine-Lao diplomatic relations.

One highlight of the visit was the unveiling of a commemorative stand erected in one corner of the Philippine Embassy grounds in Vientiane honoring



June 7, 2003: Quezon City, Fred Mendoza hosting the "mini-reunion" of Mekong Circle Philippines. From left, front row: Connie Sebolena, Vicki Villanueva, Jovit Cabrera, Jovit Revilla, George Villanueva. Back row, from left: Tony Agustin, Fred Reyes, Ben Revilla, Fred Mendoza, Raul de Jesus, Sonia Ballo, Gil Cabrera. Not in

photo Edna Savady and husband. The menu: "tham song" from Jovit, lechon, laing, garlic prawns, chicken from Edna, inihaw na tilapia, hito, mangga, saging, langka, bibingkang puto, fried saba, cake from Raul, leychee, buko pandan, suman, sala-bat, bulalo, fruit salad. Said Fred: "Sarap, pero mas masarap ang pagkikita."

the humanitarian work of Filipinos in Laos. Here's the Balik-Laos group in front of the stand: seated left to right Anthony Dejesus, Fenny Victa, Tony Victa, Baby Marquez. Back row standing, from left: Lydia Palma, Consul Raul Dado, Bik Marquez, Ambassador Galman, Jojo Pablo, Puring de Jesus, Raul de Jesus, Gene Hernandez, Jij de Jesus, Estrella Hernandez, Ciony Ljungar, Cora Victa. Other Balik-Laos participants not shown were Linda Cao Savangsy, David Khoun Savangsy and Somsack Sayborivong.

Many of the city's once familiar sights were gone, replaced by new buildings and new roads, hordes of zipping Honda & Suzuki motorbikes as well as the fixtures of a modern city (would you believe Internet cafes and golf driving ranges, lighted for night use?)

One landmark they sadly missed was the OB Vientiane Hospital in That Luang. After 42 years along Phone Keng Road, it had been razed a week before they arrived. The OB Administration Building still stood, occupied by a United Nations agency office. It too would be torn down, we were told.



To view this photo in color, and to read an account of the last days of the OB Vientiane Hospital, log on to our website, click on "Projects", then on "Balik-Laos Trip", then on "Progress Report", then click on "Update Vientiane."



June 14, 2003 New Jersey Mekong members met at the residence of Louie Manlapig in Tom Rivers. From left: Vic Capili, Sining Capili, Vivian Dimaunahan, Louie Manlapig, Rene Dimaunahan Val Handog (of New York).

August 9, 2003 East Coast members from New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania will meet at the lakeside house of Tony and Cora Sazon. Agenda: mobilizing attendance to the Chicago reunion and bringing enough eats to surpass the Philippine mini-reunion feast.

ATTENTION: ALL MEMBERS

1. It's not too early to register for our reunion. Send the form today. We need it in order to plan a most enjoyable event for you.
2. We sent this Newsletter and the registration form to the names in our New York 2002 Reunion Souvenir Program. If there are any members in the directory not listed whom you know, please call the Reunion Committee so that we can include them in our mailings.
3. We welcome any submissions, comments, for our next Newsletter. Email to fuentecilla@aol.com or call 212 603 1141 or 718 468 3038

CORPORATE OFFICE

375 South Mayfair Ave. Suite 286
Daly City, California 94015 USA
Tel. 650 991 3335 Fax 650 991 0867
Email: bikmarquez@hotmail.com

PHILIPPINE REUNION OFFICE

Tony Agustin
564 Sipat
Plaridel, Pampanga
Tel. 044 795 2662
Email: ara_rha@mozcom.com

2004 REUNION COMMITTEE

Puring de Jesus
1638 Ontario St.
Oshkosh, Wisconsin 54901 USA
Tel. 920 232 8210 513 868 9396
Fax 920 237 4690 Email: prdejesus@aol.com