

# MEKONG

CIRCLE INTERNATIONAL

NOVEMBER 2003

Welcome to the 2nd issue of our Mekong Circle 2004 Reunion newsletter.

The first issue, August 2003, which was mailed to more than 400 members, contained the registration form for our August 2004 reunion. Too early to fill it out and mail, you say? Okay, so let's say there are three to four of you coming and you do not wish to lay out the registration fees at this early stage. Fine. Then, do this: pull out the form, and mark the box that says "Check to follow". Then mail it in. Today. Then we can reserve your place. You can mail your check later. We need at least this commitment from you in order that we can plan well for everybody's enjoyable stay and celebration.

This issue introduces a series on the various groups that make up our Association. We begin with USAID-Laos. Although the origins of Mekong Circle date back from 1976 when some 50 ex- Laos Filipinos reunited in California, we go much farther back...to 1957. That's when the first Filipinos arrived in Laos. By the mid-1960s, there were an estimated 900 resident Pinoys and Pinays. Below are snapshots of the major groups. There were many other organizations which employed Filipinos as well as self-employed entrepreneurs. Taken together they were the pioneering OFWs -- overseas Filipino workers -- a designation that described the many hundreds of thousands of Filipinos who, much later in the 1970s to the 1990s, settled to work in all the world's continents.

**AIR AMERICA** Its aircraft first began flying over Laos in 1957. By the mid-1970s, "the airline had some two dozen twin-engine transports, another two dozen short-take-off-and landing (STOL) aircraft, and some 30 helicopters," wrote William Leary in a history of the airline. "There were more than 300 pilots, copilots, flight mechanics, and air-freight specialists flying out of Laos and Thailand." Many of these non-flying personnel were Filipinos, estimated at 200 at one time by a former Air America Filipino accountant. Its operations ended in 1974.

**BIRD & SON** supplied and flew many of the STOL aircraft. Like Air America, the company was contracted by the U.S. government to support its operations in Laos. Filipino technicians helped maintain the planes.

**CONTINENTAL AIR SERVICES**, a subsidiary of the U.S. company Continental Airlines, bought Bird & Son in August 1965. About 100 Filipinos, mainly mechanics based in Vientiane, worked for CAS.

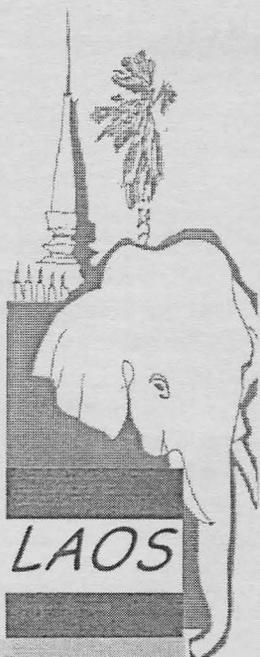
**ECCOIL** Eastern Construction Company in Laos, a private firm based in Manila, supplied Filipino specialists,

beginning in 1959, to the Royal Lao Government to teach their military personnel in ordnance, maintenance, storage, and supply procedures. By the early 1960s, there were 500 to 600 Filipino ECCOIL technicians in Laos. In 1962, an international agreement to a "neutral" Laos called for the pullout of all foreign military advisers, including ECCOIL.

**OPERATION BROTHERHOOD** 13 of the first OB volunteers -- doctors, nurses, social workers, nutritionists and administrative staff -- arrived in Laos on January 7, 1957. They joined a 2-man advance team who arrived in Vientiane two days earlier. Within five weeks, 44 volunteers were assigned to five provinces. When OB ended its services in 1975, more than 400 had served mostly 2-year terms there.

**USAID-LAOS** An economic assistance program took root in 1954 soon after the country became an independent country. It covered a vast scope, from agriculture and roads, to education, refugee relief and public health. Its offices in Vientiane was staffed with a large number of Filipinos, estimated at 175.

*In 1975, when a new government took control of Laos, all foreign operations were terminated.*



LAOS

Keep these dates open for our next reunion:

August 6, 7 & 8 2004

Chicago, Illinois USA

# FILIPINOS WITH USAID-LAOS: THEY COULD NOT RUN IT WITHOUT US

Fidel Padayao remembers the day he left for Laos – Dec. 7, 1957 – one in the first batch of about 35 persons – flown to Vientiane by his employer in Manila, the U.S. Agency for International Development. Others in the group that he remembers were Wenceslao Eusebio, Monching Romano, Virgilio Concepcion, Romy Pestanas. More recruits came from other Philippine-based U.S. employers such as the U.S. Veterans Administration Office or Clark Air Force Base in Pampanga where Celso Orense and perhaps 10 to 15 more were hired from.

Their choice made sense. Who better to help staff an economic aid program in a neighboring Asian country but Asians themselves, with aid experience.

Two years earlier, the U.S. government had decided to expand its aid program in Laos. It established its US Operations Mission, and later that year in 1955, a Program Evaluation Office within USOM to handle military aid.

By the time USOM Laos had transformed into USAID Laos to focus on non-military aid only, Fidel and company grew in numbers. He estimates that they peaked at 175 at one time.

"The Filipinos were mostly engineers and accountants," the latter, about 20, forming the largest group in USAID, said Pestanas. "There were perhaps 80 Americans working with USAID then." But as the aid program amplified into a vast bureaucracy that touched almost every layer of the

Lao government and into every province, the American administrators realized there were not enough trained Lao to execute it.

"The program was intensively opera-



Laos Pinoy, 1960s, most of them former employees with USAID Laos. Front row, from left: Paeng Mapaye, unidentified, Jun Ventura, Mike Andres, Nick Dolorfino, Alfredo Trinidad. Back row, third from left, Poly Natividad; the others in the photo are unidentified.

tional and A.I.D. employees were directly involved in normal host-country service and maintenance operations," an evaluation of the 21-year, \$896 million effort reported. The Filipinos, almost all of them college-degreed, and experts in their fields, provided the vital administrative and support network necessary. Though most were posted in Vientiane, others followed up aid projects in the provincial capitals, helping oversee the construction of schools, roads, the provision of supplies and services.

"We were fluent in English...and Lao," says Fidel and so they also served as a bridge between the American administrators and the Lao.

Qualified local help was so scarce that

ECCOIL Filipino technicians, ordered to leave Laos as a result of the Geneva 1962 agreement were hired by USAID Manila and returned to Laos. Rafael Mapaye, a former USAID accountant, estimates there were as many as 50 such returnees.

Dr. Charles Weldon assigned in 1963 to head the Public Health Division, wrote in his 1999 memoir; "At that time there were only about 30 Americans in USAID Laos, and half of them were stationed in the field. Because there were so few Lao with English language ability or office skills, most of the non-American employees were Filipinos." That included his secretary Esther Cordova, whom he described as "a petite, pleasant-looking lady."

When they first arrived in 1957, they were lodged in four houses in Nahaidio, a short distance from what would sprawl into the a number of buildings composing the USAID compound, including a clubhouse known as ACA – American Community Association.

"It was rough, those early days," Pestanas remembers. "We had to boil our water, we felt very remote from civilization, few if any paved streets." Sharing rooms, dormitory-style, it was easy to forge lasting bonds among themselves. How this happens is described below by Connie de la Pena-Frias who worked for nine years (1967 – 1976) with USAID's General Services Division in Vientiane. --Pete Fuentes

## SWEET MEMORIES OF POTLUCK LUNCHES UNDER A TREE

On my first days at work, I met Luisa Cuevas-Mapaye, who was married to Paeng. Oscar, my husband, was working for the Agricultural Division. Lulu, as she was known, worked for the Management Office. Her bosses were the big shots, if you will. Lulu was an outstanding worker and loved by her bosses. She was the one who introduced me to Fe Parica who was secretary to the Chief of Transportation. They composed my first Filipino circle of friends who encouraged me to join the after-office-hours chats at the ACA.

There was a Filipino band there which moonlighted while keeping their daytime USAID jobs. Singing customers were a common sight. There was also the Wednesday Night Bingo, the twice-weekly, 25-cent movies, the Friday or Saturday night disco, this time dancing

to the music of a real band hired from home.

There was a local cinema, the Lane Xang, and its American western and Bruce Lee features. Visiting friends on weekends was a pleasant pastime. So many things going on, boredom had no chance to settle – Sunday cockfights, mahjong, card games, birthday parties.

A Philippine School of Laos was founded, providing teaching jobs to teacher spouses who had accompanied their husbands to Laos. Basketball tournaments pitted teams from USAID, OB, Air America, ECCOIL, Continental Air



Laos Pinays, 1960s, Vientiane. Seated front row: Connie dela Pena, Nits Eusebio, unidentified, Boots Magsakay, Violy Vloria, Baby Angeles, Thelma Eusebio, Melvin Howrigan, Lina Castaneda. Back row: Connie Comin, Marita Eusebio.

Services. OB players, mostly young, bested easily-tired elder USAID players.

Many USAID Pinays arrived single in Laos and left double. Or returned home to marry fiances met in Laos. Let me try to remember some maiden names: Ida Cuevas, Violy Viloria, Nena de la Fuente. My circle of friends enlarged with each passing year: Leila Concepcion, Rosemary Trinidad, Rose dela Cruz, Marilyn Encarnacion, Boots Magsakay, Praxedes Viloria, Connie Commin, Perla Lapitan, Nits Eusebio, Marita Eusebio, Inday Ruiz, Thelma Eusebio-Panutai.

There are just as many USAID men who were constant companions – Daniel Angeles, Amador Landrito, Celso Orense, Romy Pestanas, Ramon Romano, Rodrigo Reyes, Pete Encarnacion, Andy Cabiao, Polly Natividad, Mike Andres, Fidel Padayao, Manding Datu, Mr. Domondon, M. Bautista, Mr. Trinidad, Mr. Magsakay, Mr. Concepcion, Mr. Valentin, Mr. dela Cruz and Mr. Saluna.

Twenty two families lived in 12 duplexes near the USAID offices, and became known as the Filipino compound. Its residents were employ-

ees of USAID, Air America, Continental and the U.S. Embassy. My duplex neighbors were Nick and Malve Lemque with their children. Nick became the godfather of my son Robert. We spent many days sharing potluck lunches under the shade of a large tree in the compound.

Memories of those Saturday lunches, stretching into lazy afternoons of playful banter, laughter and carefree talk, our children running around, warm my heart so deeply everytime I remember them.



Founding members of the Vientiane Golf and Country Club, in the late 1960s – front row, from left: Poly Natividad, Mike Andres, Del Delaon, Philip Alano, Sam Garland, George Alba, Sorina Pekson, Monching Romano, Rey Zamora, Paeng Mapaye,

Manding Datu. Back row, from left: Dr. Chanto, Jun Ventura, Capt. Ben, Freddie Ancheita, unidentified, Larry Woodson, Ida Cuevas Hannon, Mr. Sayarath, Consul Watanabe, Myron Thomas, Ricardo Pekson, Saykham, Nick Dolorfino, unidentified.

## WHEN GOLF WAS A PASSION AND THREE WERE A CLUB

When a visitor to Vientiane in November 2002 returned there after 35 years, his host invited him to play golf. The visitor said the last time he played rolling round objects into a hole, he was a kid playing with marbles. Okay, no holes, just driving, the host said.

Sure enough, there was a driving range, within city limits. It was lighted for nighttime use; a vast net at one end of the field to catch the balls; tables, chairs; and a bar. Not knowing how to swing a club at all, the visitor sought the company of the bar girl for small talk and to marvel at the sight of grown men swinging metal sticks into a dark sky; and to wonder at how things have really

changed in the city since he left.

Four decades ago, golf was non-existent in Laos. Not because the land was mostly mountains and jungles. And not for lack of players. There was a war going on, 20 years still on going by the mid-1960s. Bombs were falling. Refugees were fleeing. The country needed a golf course like a hole in the head.

A number of Filipino Vientiane residents decided they needed it, a course, that is. And so, driven by an unexplainable urge (we all have them), they went about digging holes – three holes to start with. One of them, **Paeng Mapaye**, describes below their historic, one big swing for

golfing mankind.

(Fast forward to 2003. There are now 2 courses within a half hour drive from the center of the city. One is said to have 18 holes, the other 6 holes. If you stay at the Lao Plaza Hotel, you can rent golf clubs and shoes. Farther out an hour away is the Dansavanh Nam Ngum Resort. It is building an 18-hole course, to complement the obligatory resort pleasures — casino, swimming pool, sauna, lake speedboats, satellite TV. That tourist guide bible of backpackers "The Lonely Planet" does not dare mention these courses, fearing the invasion of golf club-wielding barbarians will spoil their pristine backpacking paradise).

### HOW GOLF BEGAN, LAOS-STYLE

By Paeng Mapaye

The year was early 1963 when I, Mike Andres and Poly Natividad, all USAID Laos employees, discussed how we can indulge in our passion. We started by digging three holes around the That Luang grounds. With only three clubs at our disposal – one driver and two irons belonging to me that I

brought from the Philippines – we played every weekend. Bewildered Laotians watched incomprehendingly.

With three clubs and three players and three holes, we called our group, what else, the 3-in-1 Golf Club. The following year, we were joined by three USAID new employees – Luisa Cuevas (now Mapaye), Nena dela Fuente, and Trinidad Redentor. I don't know why we did not rename us the 6-in-1 Club. Shortly thereafter, as more people joined us, we scouted for a new "green."

We chose Dong Dok, at Km. 9. Work began on a nine-hole course.

With some Lao help, we cleared out the bushes, felled trees, leveled the ground with a bulldozer operated by Mariano Ponce. Then we proceeded to the next evolutionary step – a new name: Vientiane Golf and Country Club – and its benefits thereof, namely a constitution and by-laws. There was no solid structure to retire to for the “Club”. We ate our fried chicken and drank San Miguel outdoors. But the “Country” look was all around.

Regular tournaments were held. Annual trips to Thailand also became a tradition.

Here is a list of the Club members, apart from the original founders already mentioned:

USAID Laos: Pert Valido, Ida Cuevas-Hannon, Joe Banda, Monching Romano, Myron Thomas, Alex Claraval, Mariano Ponce, Mang Doming.

Operation Brotherhood (OB): George Alba, Rey Zamora, Gani Bautista, Gus Panahon, Raul Dejesus, Puring Roque (now Dejesus), Danny Torres, Cesar Mendoza, Joe Barcelona, Ben Babasa, Narding Hilario, Sonia Morales.

International Volunteer Service (IVS): Larry Woodson.

OICC: Manding Datu, Ricardo Pekson, Pete Aniez

ECCOIL: Rey Ancheta, Freddie Ancheta

Philippine Embassy: Consul Rudy Sanchez, Philip Alano, Capt. Ben Self-employed Filipino residents: Nick Dolorfino, Del Delaon, Jur Ventura, Ding Orante, Phil Aquino, Sorena Pekson.

In time, we evolved into a multinational club – Filipino, Lao, Thai, Americans, Indonesians, Vietnamese, French, Japanese. Among them (some full names I cannot remember, and this list is not complete) : Ambassador Shimoda, Consul Watanabe, Yamashita, Osamonishii, Akiyama, Murano Nagamura, Ichichasi, Furuyama, Yoshimatsu, Okaji, Phagna Leaur, Rajasombat, Samlith, Sommay, Lakeo, Saykam, Sayarath, Pravit, Chao Sopsaisana, Consul Sawat, Col. Pongstabon, Brown, Medlin, Dave Johnston, Sam Garland, Byron Height, Norman Barne, Dr. Kuehne, Dr. Chanto, Dr. Fonton, Col. Gus Derpo, Consul Fernandez.

By the early 1970s, we had 80 membership-fee paying players. Our Japanese members initiated the construction of a course near Wattay Airport. When it was completed, Vientiane had its first real golf course – Bermuda grass, fairways, and a club house.

Sadly, we enjoyed it for only a short while. When a Communist government took over Laos in 1975, most of our members had to leave the country. I don't know what happened to the golf course. I have settled in the USA, where my happy golfing memories still live on



OB School of Nursing, class of 1965, with their instructors and OB officers. Aged 18 to 20 at that time, the nurses are now in their 50s. We remember and called them by their first names: First row, left to right: Khaimouk, Samnaw, project manager Vitoy Naranjo, instructors Pet Duruin, Cecile Datu, "Toots" Calderon, Joji Naranjo, assistant project manager Boni Gillego, Rabieb. Second row, from left: Chanpraseuth, Siphone, Phoukham, Khamfong, Susada, Somlack, Khamchanh, Phousavong, Tong sai, Lamoun, Manivanh, Phengsy. Third row, from left: Phikoun, Khamkhouang, Thongphan, Chom, interpreter (name unknown), Khambai, Phet, Bounkhong, Bounthan.

## WHERE HAVE ALL OUR NURSES GONE ?

Two and a half years after the first team of Filipino OB doctors and nurses started seeing patients in 1957 in an open air clinic near the grounds of the That Luang shrine in Vientiane, a brand-new hospital was dedicated on June 1960 a few minutes walk away. It had 60 beds and various diagnostic services as well as a dispensary. But it sorely lacked skilled Lao help to assist bedside nursing, ran lab tests, prepare X-ray readings, help in the dental, pharmacy, outpatient and dietary sections.

In particular there was critical short

staffing in nursing aides. Hence even as the foundations of the new hospital were being laid, a quick course to train them was started by nurse Petra Duruin Sismaet. Within a year they were ready and helping. Nonetheless the crush of patients and plans to expand bed capacity foretold the need for more help. It was time to think about an extended course to turn out more Lao nurses.

A two-year program began in 1961. When the last class graduated in 1969, more than a hundred young men and women completed the course — 28 in 1963, 17 in 1964, 22 in 1965, 31 in

1967, 18 in 1968 and 32 in 1969, the last class. For our Lao nurses, it was a tough course to begin with. Competitive qualifying tests were given at all OB hospital provincial sites, and the best were sent to Vientiane. For the 1965 - 1967 class, 30 qualified out of 148 candidates.

The chosen few knew they were a special class. In the 1950s and 60s, Lao nurses in practice were trained abroad – in Hanoi, Saigon or Bangkok. And most were one-year auxiliary nurses. The OB School of Nursing was the only school in the country that conducted a full two-year

course. The instructional staff — BSN-degreed Filipino nurses, compressed their four-year Philippine college curriculum into a program that was heavy on practical clinical skills learned on the ward floors of the OB Vientiane Hospital. Classroom lectures were assisted by interpreters. An English language course provided facility in basic conversational vocabulary which became essential when they interpreted between Lao patients and the newly arrived Filipino doctors and nurses, still struggling with the Lao language. Two Filipino artists — **Tony Liwag** and **Leila Lareza** — produced poster-sized anatomy and physiology training aids. In time, a number of the graduates proved so talented they themselves served as instructor assistants in the classroom and in the wards.

Dormitories behind the OB House, a 10-minute walk from the hospital, served as their home for two years. Those who were residents of Vientiane could return to their parents on weekends. Those recruited from the provinces looked to the day after graduation when they would return there to help staff the OB hospitals. Dormitory life together with the rigors of tests and clinical shifts forged bonds among them and their instructors after the last graduates had passed each high point of their training — the candle ceremony, the capping ceremony and that graduation group photo, all of them lined up in their starched uniforms, diploma in hand, proudly beaming.

Just as exultant were their teachers — among them nurses turned educators such as **Joji Naranjo**, **Cecile Salarda Datu**, **Amie Malolos**, **Fely Montoya Navera**, **Minerva Erese**, **Norma Opiniano**, **Lolita Delaon**, **Pat Garde**, **Jovit Revilla**, **Vilma Valenzuela**. Teaching life-saving skills to teenagers with mostly a Grade 6 schooling had required a lot of patience. Students and teachers alike still remember with awe and admiration the high standards set by the hospital's director of nursing and education **Vicenta "Toots" Calderon**, who had a masters degree from New York's Columbia University's School of Nursing.

In 1975, uncertain of their future with the new Communist government, many of our Lao nurses joined the exodus across the Mekong river to Thailand and beyond — France, Canada, Australia, England and the USA. Others stayed on to assist the French-trained Lao doctors from Mahosot Hospital and the armed forces who were assigned to the Vientiane hospital after the departure of the Filipino staff in the same year.

More than 35 (by our last count, and still looking) have settled in the USA and raised families. A number continued nursing, or earned their RN licenses in the US, no small accomplishment when your English comprehension is not native and the culture is alien. Fortunately, the OB program was somewhat patterned to the U.S. licensed practical nursing course.

Said Cecile Datu "our nurses who settled in California started out as nursing aides and

excelled in those jobs. When they showed their school transcripts to the California Board of Nursing to apply for their practical nurse licenses, the Board was surprised to see that our nurses had more classroom and ward credits than the U.S. LPN program. On that basis, the Board allowed them to sit for the licensing exams."

"I give credit to our OB nursing course," **Chantaloom Phouangmalay**, now living in Aurora, Illinois, told Cecile. After obtaining their LPN degrees, a number like Chantaloom proceeded to earn RN degrees in the US. The other RNs are **Thraivan Somchay**, now working in Charlottesville, Virginia; **Khamsy Siharath** of San Diego, California; **Sounthara Sananikone** of Upland, California; **Sumatra Malaythong** of Merced, California; **Vanessa Tongma** of La Crescenta, California; **Bonnie Vongsavanth** of Modesto, California; **Rabieb Vilahong-Roy** of Springfield, Illinois; **Phikoun Keomahathai** of Charlottesville, Virginia.

Phikoun had arrived in the USA in 1975 together with her husband Adul and their three children. Adul was an x-ray technician, one of many OB-trained auxiliaries besides nurses (others: dental, lab, mechanics, illustrators). They both found work with the University of Virginia hospital, she as a nursing aide before obtaining her RN degree, and he as a respiratory technician. Phikoun has retired and now manages two family owned ethnic restaurants. One son is a doctor.

Adul remembers his trainer Dr. Bill

### A REUNION WITHIN A REUNION

When Rabieb Vilayhong, class of 1965, and living in Illinois, USA, came upon the telephone number in England of **Sengkham Pannhasith**, a classmate, they had not seen or heard each other since 1974.

"I grabbed the phone and dialed her," she said. "And she was there." There was so much to tell each other after 29 years. "We talked and laughed and talked for almost an hour." Once again, for that moment, they were young student nurses living together in their Vientiane dorm behind the OB House. Instantly they realized that those times are precious parts of their past that the other graduates would want to relive face-to-face.

Rabieb, a member of the Chicago reunion organizing committee, is proposing to gather the class of 1965 as well as the other five classes, into one get together. It will be the first such reunion of the OB School of Nursing. The Chicago committee has endorsed the project. Auxiliaries graduates— x-ray, lab, and others -- will also be invited. Their reunion will coincide with the Chicago reunion. Special events or activities will highlight the affair.

"It's going to be so much fun if we can get many to come," says Rabieb.

**Comia**, Vientiane's radiologist (now living in Roxas, Oriental Mindoro, Philippines) and how he himself trained his Lao counterparts who were the assigned to OB hospitals in Paksong, Attopeu and Sayaboury. **Rabieb Vilayhong-Roy** settled in Chicago with her husband after arriving in the US. In 1975, worked in a nursing home before she began in 1980 as a state Department of Health counselor to immigrant southeast Asian refugees. One daughter married an American; an RN so married an American nurse.

Another nurse, **Chanpraseut Xayasouk** of Rockford, Illinois, found herself similarly helping refugees, lately from Bosnia and Iraq as an employee with a city health agency. A graduate of the 1965 class, she was assigned to O Saravane for three years, was transferred to O Pakse, then crossed to Thailand into a refugee camp in Ubon before immigrating to the USA in 1979. One daughter is married to an American orthopedic surgeon, another daughter, a ban worker, is married to an American employee at Merrill Lynch, the brokerage firm.

**Thongba Keota's** journey to Wakarusa, Indiana, like Chanpraseuth's, originated from a refugee camp in Thailand but took longer to travel. After graduating in 1965, she served with OB Van Vieng, then returned to the Vientiane hospital. She and her husband **Bounkhong**, also an OB nurse, and four children then languished for two years and two months in the refugee camp before a U.S. church group in Wakarusa sponsored their immigration visas in 1981. Their Mekong river crossing by boat in the dead of night to Thailand cost a fortune "perhaps \$1,000 in gold, from our OB savings," she said. She now works as a nursing assistant in a nursing home in Wakarusa. Her husband passed away in September 2002.

For those who chose to stay in Laos, several have scaled the heights of their profession. **Bounthan Oudom**, among the first graduates transferred to the 450-bed Mahosot Hospital in 1979, the country's premier acute care facility in Vientiane, where she is now Chief of the Nursing Unit. In the same hospital, **Sivone Urai Chandara**, class of 1968, is the nurse manager of the Operating Room and Recovery Room. Fluent in English and French, she attended workshops in Manila, Japan and studied OR management in France for six months in 1996. A nurse name **Nithaya** (last name not known) is said to be Mahosot administrative director. **Phengthong Vongphrachant**, class of 1969, became a doctor.

These are only a handful of many more of our Lao nurses. Each, when contacted, has a fascinating story to tell of how the youthful exuberance of their teenaged years as OB student nurses has not dimmed today as they reach their mid 50s. They rejoice with tales of grown children and grandchildren, and hungrily seek news of the Filipino teachers who were once their mentors and then colleagues before the years and history drew them apart.

-- Pete Fuentesilla



## THE 1920s

Two Filipino pilots land in Seno, Savannakhet province, in a refueling stop from Manila enroute to Madrid. They were attempting to match a Madrid to Manila flight by two Spaniards. Laos at that time, together with Vietnam, comprised France's Indochinese colony.

**1956** – Angel Cordova and wife arrive in Vientiane from Manila, the first Filipinos to staff the United States Operations Mission, the precursor to USAID Laos.

**1956 OCTOBER 20** – Operation Brotherhood-Vietnam staff members Jovito Naranjo and Fruto Bingcang arrive from Saigon to begin a 3-month survey of Laos in preparation for the transfer of OB to Laos upon invitation of the Lao Jaycees.

**1956 NOVEMBER** – OB Vietnam personnel – Dr. Jesus Banzon, nurse Petra Duruin and secretary Josefina Figueroa — staff a first aid clinic for one week during the That Luang festival in Vientiane to test Lao response.

**1957 JANUARY 7** – Thirteen OB volunteers arrive in Vientiane.

**1957 DECEMBER** – First group of USOM Filipinos arrive from Manila

**1957** – Air America begins operations; Filipino technicians are added

**1959** – Eastern Construction Company in Laos (ECCOIL) military advisers begin teaching Royal Lao Armed Forces

**1961** – Filipino residents in Laos estimated to reach 500

**1964 AUGUST 27** – Philippine Speaker of the Congressional House of Representatives Cornelio Villareal is the highest ranking Philippine government official to visit Laos

**1965** – Filipino residents in Laos estimated to reach 900

**1965 JANUARY 1** – Filipino Association of Laos inducts its first

officers and Board members.\*

**1965 AUGUST 28** – Continental Air Services begins operations, hiring Filipinos from Air America and from the Philippines

**1965 SEPTEMBER 17** – Consul Rodolfo Sanchez, resident consular officer, arrives to open first Philippine Embassy

**1965 OCTOBER 26** – Ambassador Felipe Mabilangan, first resident chief of mission, presents his credentials to the King.

**1966 NOVEMBER** — First Philippine Pavilion participation at That Luang festival in Vientiane.

**1976 MARCH 20** – Mekong Circle organized in Los Angeles, California

**1995 MAY 20** – First reunion of Mekong Circle in Los Angeles (then 1998 in LA; 2000 in San Francisco; 2002 in New York City)

**2002 NOVEMBER 3** – Eleven former OB and USAID employees arrive in Vientiane for a one week group tour. It is their first time to return after all foreign employees left Laos in 1975. Trip is part of the Philippine Embassy's Balik-Laos program, inspired by Ambassador Mario Galman. They were accompanied by their children and other relatives. During a courtesy call with the Lao Minister of Health, he invited OB to resume its medical program which was terminated in 1975.

\* We have no record of the first officers. The second set, elected on December 25, 1966 for the 1967 term were: Pedro Assidao, (ECCOIL) president; Narding Hilario (OB) vice president; Romy Pestanas (USAID) and Bayani Suarez (auditors). Board members: Ernie Felix (Air America); Nick Dolorfino (Dolorfino Construction); Celso Orense (USAID); Danny Torres (OB); Leonardo Pestanas (USAID). Appointed Board Members: Nick Bustamante (OB); Mon Romano (USAID); Deo Caro (Air America); Bert Casupan (Continental); Buenventura Dola (ECCOIL); Capt. Isagani Blanco (Royal Air Lao).

## MEKONG CIRCLE BROCHURE AVAILABLE

We have produced a brochure that describes the history of our association as well as the first projects it is taking on: medical missions and school scholarships. It states that Mekong Circle has been granted Federal tax-exempt status that donors can avail of. There is also mention of our Chicago 2004 Reunion. Supplies of the brochure were distributed to Board Members. They are useful as a mailing piece for those who do not have access to our website.

The two-fold brochure fits into a regular No. 10 envelope. For copies, contact Puring Dejesus (920 232 8210).





## UPDATE: *Chicago Program Taking Shape*

Here is the tentative schedule the Organizing Committee has put together at an August 31, 2003 meeting:

### Friday, August 6, 2004

8:00 am Registration opens

5:00 pm Baci Welcome Ceremony

6:30 Buffet Dinner

Rest of the day: short general meeting, election of Officers and Board Members, social and cultural activities.

### Saturday, August 7, 2004

Morning: Free time. City tours.

12 noon: Buffet lunch for second-generation members

Evening: Dinner Dance

### Sunday, August 8, 2004

10 am : Mass at the Hospitality Suite at the Hyatt Regency Hotel

Noon: Brunch (costs not covered by registration fee)

Reminders: Registration fee is \$100 per person. Arrangements will soon be made with Hyatt Regency Hotel in downtown Chicago to begin accepting member reservations beginning sometime early next year. Rate is \$130 plus taxes, double occupancy (two beds in one room). You will be informed.

The August meeting at the Abad residence is the third time the Committee has met. Previous meetings were held September 28, 2002 and April 26, 2003. Members present at the August meeting: Dick and Lily Abad, Raul and Puring Dejesus, her son Anthony, Joe and Lina Luna, Linda Masibay, Henry & Dolly Nano, Jocce Nantes, Pete and Edith Paluay, Ron and Rabieb Vilayhong-Roy, Louie and Gladys Tabano.

Responses to the first mailing of the Registration and the Newsletter have been encouraging. Pledges to attend have topped 100 so far. Puring has been following up personally with phone calls. We expect increased attendance from ex-USAID, Air America, and ECCOIL members.

Among those who have already registered are **Connie Frias** (Canada), **Teddy & Lydilla Parreno** (New Jersey), **Bac and Joy Bacardo** (Pennsylvania), **Alex and Lynne del Carmen** (Tennessee), **Marie Aguilos and Ampie Malolos** (New York), **Laling Endrigo** (Indiana), **Amphone Manivong** (Illinois), **Bob and Asil Monserrat** (Washington), **Lydia Palma** (Washington), **Tony and Gina Liwag** (Ohio), **Juan and Lourdes Alberto Ilaw** (California).

**Bik Marquez** (California) and **Lydia Palma** (Washington) have bought full-page ads in the souvenir program. **Pete Fuentecilla** (New York) will be putting together the publication. Ad rates are \$120 full page; \$70 half page.

Our membership database, maintained by Puring, is on its way to full reliability. From our mailing to 375 members of the August newsletter (and its reunion registration form) only 10 addresses were returned as undeliverable. We'll keep updating our roster with your help: give us names of members you know who have not received the mailings.

### Did you lose your Reunion Registration Form ?

Download it from our website [www.mekongcircle.org](http://www.mekongcircle.org). Click on 2004 Reunion.  
Then print it out.

## OUR AUSTRALIA-BASED MEMBERS COME VISITING



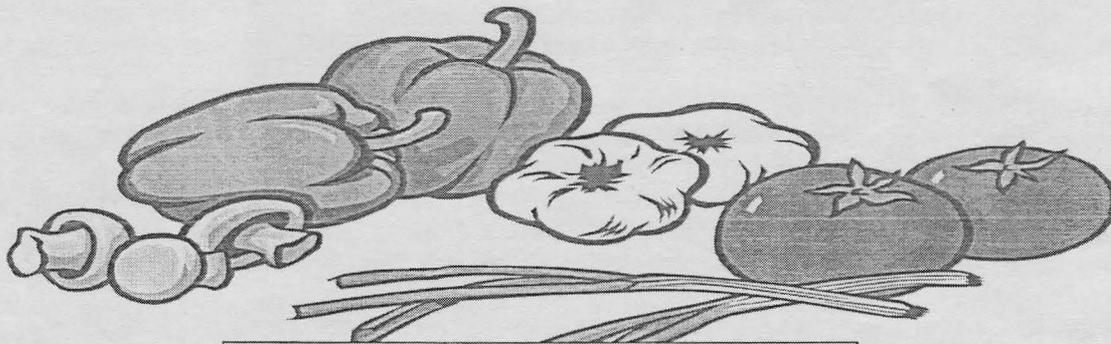
OB nurses **Vic and Cely Lagleva**, visiting from Australia, were treated to Mekong-Texas hospitality last August 17. Seated from left: **Myrla Agbayani**, **Cely**, **Cely Labao** (OB), **Vivian Dimaunahan** (OB). Standing, from left: **Pete Encarnacion** (USAID), **Mario Dulyunan** (OB) and wife **Auring**, **Naty Encarnacion** (US Embassy), **Romy Agbayani** (OB), **Rene Dimaunahan** (OB), **Vic**. Hosts were **Rene and Vivian** at their home left, in Missouri, Texas.

## CHICAGO : VISIT IT ON THE WEB

It has a lake, a tall building (Sears) once the tallest in the world, a gigantic exhibition hall (McCormick Place), a baseball club franchise (Cubs), a Museum of Science and Technology and a fierce winter wind. Fortunately, our reunion in the city is in the summer.

For a tour of the many other sights to enjoy during our free times, go to our website ([www.mekongcircle.org](http://www.mekongcircle.org)). Click on "Reunion 2004". Then click on "[cityofchicago.org](http://cityofchicago.org)". Then click on "Exploring Chicago." It's all there, including the weather.

The Organizing Committee has plans to organize a number of tours to the most popular sights. So, allow some time for these excursions in your schedules.



### *Lao Food Recipe Book*

Calling all lovers of "tam song", "feuh", "meeheng", "padek" which goes well with "kao niaw."

A group of Mekong nutritionists is putting together a guide to Lao cuisine, an idea inspired by Ciony Agbayani-Ljungar, a social worker -cook -lover of Lao food.

The authors are Linda Masibay, Gladys Tabano, Ofie de los Reyes and Jocee Nantes.

Send your favorite recipe to Linda at 2943 N. Nashville, Chicago, Illinois 60634. Tel 773 889 1753.  
Email: [ecmasibay1@msn.com](mailto:ecmasibay1@msn.com)

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