

## *Ambassador Mario Galman, 56, Inspired Balik-Laos Journey*



Inside the Philippine Embassy, Vientiane, at the reception Nov. 7, 2002 following unveiling of the commemorative marker. In front left, Ambassador Mario Galman and Consul Raul Dado. Behind them from left, Cora Victa, Tony Victa, Lydia Palma and Embassy Attache Tony Gonzales.

The Philippine Ambassador to Laos died April 11, 2003 in a Florida hospital from a cerebral hemorrhage, his uncle Dr. Pedro Gonzales, a former Operation Brotherhood physician, said.

Mr. Galman had been staying with Pete and his wife Lewie, an OB nurse, in their residence in Kissimmee, Florida since early March while undergoing treatment for leukemia.

Appointed Ambassador to Laos on September 2000 by President Gloria Arroyo, Mr. Galman will be long remembered by Mekong Circle members for initiating the Balik-Laos program. When 17 Filipinos and Lao from the United States, Canada and the Philippines arrived in Vientiane on November 5, 2002, for most of them it was their first return to Laos after more than three decades.

During the 1950s and the mid-70s, there were hundreds of Filipinos who had worked there, employed as engineers, health care personnel, technicians, administrators with various aid agencies and the Lao government. They were all forced to leave in 1975 when a new Communist government was installed at the end of the Vietnam war.

Balik-Laos was conceived to encourage these former residents and workers to visit the country, and incidentally, to return to the USA where most of them had resettled, by way of the Philippines, thus contributing to tourism revenues for both countries. The Lao government heartily endorsed the program which will culminate in 2005, marking 50 years of Philippine-Lao diplomatic relations.

The first group which stayed for a week was treated to a series of emotional gatherings organized by Mr. Galman as well as visits to former worksites and homes. The high point was the unveiling of a commemorative stand erected on one corner of the Philippine Embassy grounds in the capital city of Vientiane honoring all the Filipinos who did humanitarian work in Laos (for a photo of the stand, go back to the Home page and click on "Annual Report 2002").

At one of the party gatherings, OB accountant Puring Roque Dejesus was told by Consul Raul Dado of the Embassy that "he had never seen the Ambassador so happy, reading Tagalog poems, singing and dancing."

Said Mekong Circle president Bik Marquez, "We were with the Ambassador for only one week but it felt like a lifetime."

During his assignment in Laos, Mr. Galman presided over other initiatives with equal vigor. On Dec. 14, 2001, a \$90 million agreement was signed between a Filipino company Advanced Technology System, Inc. and the Societe Lao Import-Export the trading arm of the Lao government. The joint venture has set up a coffee processing plant in Champassak province that will diversify into canned meat production, the processing of pineapple and tomato paste products.

He has been pursuing financial sponsorship among foreign aid agencies for the resumption of the Operation Brotherhood medical aid program that served in Laos from 1957 to 1975. The Lao Health Minister had requested OB's return during a Balik-Laos courtesy call on him on November 6. Subsequently, a detailed proposal was submitted to him.

When the aging OB Hospital near the That Luang shrine was razed to the ground in 2002 to make way for a park, Mr. Galman had said he will work toward naming it after OB and moving the commemorative stand to that location.

Mr. Galman helped in arranging the state visit last April to Manila of the Lao Prime Minister.

"We are fortunate to have been associated with a man who understands how the past is not just history but a tradition that should live on, " OB nurse Jojo Pablo remarked during her Balik-Laos trip.

Before being named Ambassador, Mr. Galman had worked for 20 years with the United Nation's International Labor Organization (ILO) in Manila in many capacities as senior program and administrative support officer, Information Officer and Political Adviser. Prior to his ILO work, Mr. Galman was associated with various unions, among them the Philippine Association of Free Labor Unions, Trade Union Congress of the Philippines and the Pambansang Kilusam ng Paggawa.

He graduated in 1970 with a Bachelor of Literature in Journalism from the University of Sto. Tomas, wrote on labor and foreign policy issues for local and international publications, including the International Herald Tribute, Newsweek, Asiaweek.

Necrological services were held for the Ambassador at the Department of Foreign Affairs auditorium in Manila on April 21 after which he was buried in his hometown of Paombong, Bulacan on April 23. He was president of the Paombong Historical Society, director of the

Rotary Club of Meycauayan-East and was honored by the Bulacan provincial government in 1997 as an "Outstanding Bulakeno in Professional Service. He is survived by his wife Adoracion and two daughters, Julie and Mary Ann.

During the memorial mass, Mekong Circle vice president and board member Fred Mendoza, who is based in Manila, praised the Ambassador's work in Laos. He highlighted the initiation of the Balik-Laos program and his efforts to help Operation Brotherhood resume its services in Laos. Fred offered a sampaguita garland that the Ambassador's brother Rufino laid over the coffin

Other speakers were former colleagues of Mr. Galman with ILO, the Department of Labor and Employment, union representatives, Consul Raul Dado from the Philippine Embassy in Vientiane and other foreign affairs officials.



In the Embassy front lawn, the commemorative stand behind them, the Balik-Laos first group: front 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 Dejesus, Raul Dejesus, Gene Hernandez, Jig Dejesus, Estrella Hernandez, Ciony Ljungar, Cora Victa. Other Balik-Laos participants not shown were Linda Cao Savangsy, David Khoun Savangsy and Somsack Sayborivong.

By [Pete Fuentesilla](#)