

BAYANIHAN

"Bayanihan" literally means, "being a bayan (village)," and is thus used to refer to a spirit of communal unity and cooperation.

A newsletter of the Filipino American Council of Greater Chicago (FACGC) ©

Happy International Women's Day



International
Women's Day

#EmbraceEquity
#IWD2023

International Women's Day (March 8) is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating women's equality. (Source: <https://www.internationalwomensday.com/>).

In honor of the International Women's Month, the production volunteers of Bayanihan Newsletter are grateful to present in this month's edition the immigration story of Geraldine M. Leopoldo



Geraldine M. Leopoldo

Failure is the Mother of Success: A Woman's Journey

"Nothing is impossible; the word itself says, 'I'm possible!'"
~ Audrey Hepburn, actress and humanitarian

Audrey Hepburn grew up with adversity. Her parents divorced, she was sent away at age five, and she lived through World War II. Yet, she was the epitome of grace, strength, and determination; she excelled in the arts and inspired countless people worldwide. While I didn't live through a world war, my family had their own battles to overcome, and similarly, I experienced my parent's separation and was sent away from my homeland at age five to be raised by my maternal grandparents in a foreign country.

In 1972, at seventeen, my mother was crowned Ms. Manila, the same year when Martial Law was declared in the Philippines. My mom's entire immediate family immigrated to the U.S. leaving her behind. This was also the year I was conceived and after I was born my mother experienced postpartum depression. Without a support system in place, she made the decision to give me up. My father was no longer in the picture and she felt she had no choice.



Ginger's International Woman's Month hero: Nanay Jessie

My grandmother, 'Nanay Jessie', raised me as a single parent. By the time I started high school, she had to move to the suburbs to help care for my aunt's children, and I was left alone moving from one relative's home to another until I settled at my aunt's cousin's coach house, in the Lakeview neighborhood of Chicago where survival was a challenge. I became a vegetarian not for nutritional reasons but because I was deprived of proper meals. I was isolated, unwanted, unloved, and lacked a sense of belonging; which turned into anger, misery, and rebelliousness, causing me to fail in high school.

In my junior year, I wrote a paper that my English teacher, Mr. Baumann told me was "vulgar" and "disgusting."

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from page 1)

This same piece of writing was hailed by Mr. Bates, the Drama and Creative Writing teacher as “the best writing” he’s seen all year.

Junior year was such a difficult time for me that I wanted to drop out. Notwithstanding, it was my Drama class where I found solace and excelled. It was the one course that kept me motivated to stay in school that year. I found a safe and brave space in those classes. I remember the kind words of a fellow classmate who applauded my performance in the title role as Medea..

“The feeling of accomplishment was invigorating.”

At seventeen, I had a teacher who taught me how not to be a teacher, and, I had a teacher who nurtured me and understood the power of yet. What is yet? The simplest way to start a growth mindset.

However, what truly made me become inspired to be a better woman was becoming a mother at age of twenty-one. From experience, I knew I needed to provide my child security and stability, something which I lacked just years prior. I enrolled in college, double majored in Theater and Early Childhood Education, made it to the Dean's list, and pursued a career in arts education. After having my son, I realized that a mother just doesn't discard her child, she wants what's best for her child and that kind of sacrifice requires strength and courage. My mother and grandmother, recipients of all my teenage angst, made those sacrifices that were best for my sake.

From those experiences growing up, and from my many teachers and role models, I aspire to be a woman who never throws anyone out. I am an artist, teacher, community organizer, and researcher, who wishes to give voice to those who have been silenced. My family, students, and the community I serve have taught me to see the good in people, to speak kindly, and to walk alongside others who are alone.



A few of Ginger's family members including Olive and her mom

My daughter who is now at age seventeen, the youngest of my three children, is excelling in her junior year. She is an honor roll student at a top high school in Chicago, beautiful and poised like her grandma, kind and loving, like Nanay Jessie, with friends who call her #girlboss. She inspires me to continue sharing those values I've learned for I've seen her and her other brothers, and countless students thrive and grow in a nurturing environment. Audrey said it best, “People more than things, have to be restored, renewed, revived, reclaimed, and redeemed...Never throw out anybody.” This has become my mantra in life as I look out for my children, students, and my community.

Ginger Leopoldo is an educator, actor, director, producer, and community organizer. She is the founding Artistic Director of the Center for Immigrant Resources and Community Arts (CIRCA), and Executive Director of CIRCA Pintig. She got involved with community activism in the mid-80s at age twelve through cultural work, popular education, and the pedagogy of The Theatre of the Oppressed, the organizers later formed Pintig Cultural Group in 1991. She's grateful to Tita Ging for also being a "shero" in her life as one who is a great mentor and advocate. Ginger is a 1.75 generation Filipina American and lives in Chicago with her husband Larry and three children, Ube, Basilio, and Olive.

Where are our *kababayans* clustered in the Northside?

Filipinos remain to be clustered in certain north side zip codes around Rizal Center. The Filipino community is a fast growing community via new incoming immigrants.

Asian Alone	60618	60625	60630	60640	60646	60659	Total
Asian Indian	1,014	2015	1,225	1,130	379	3,215	8,978
Chinese	489	818	155	1,215	246	545	3,468
Filipino	2,727	3,996	2,391	985	832	1,771	12,702
Korean	395	851	378	755	649	417	3,445

(Source: American Community Survey ACS 2018-5-year estimates)

STAYING with the MISSION: The US Census figures suggest a need for a social service organization than any other Asian Groups. Hence, the Filipino American Council of Greater Chicago will continue to pursue its charitable mission as set forth in its tax-exempt status under 501(c)(3) of IRS code. (<https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/exempt-purposes-internal-revenue-code-section-501c3>)

How to help in rebuilding the Rizal Center and making it truly “home away from home” for everyone.

DONATE

To help in restoring Rizal Center, please send your check payable to FACGC to 1332 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago, IL 60613.

For online contribution, please go to:

<https://circapintig.networkforgood.com/projects/172580-bayanihan-for-rizal-center>

VOLUNTEER

Becoming a volunteer has many benefits. You'll be joining a team of volunteers working together in solidarity to build community. To volunteer, please email Sally Velasco-Richmond at sallyvelascor@yahoo.com or call her at 773-541-1725. For more information go to <https://rizalcenterchicago.org/volunteer-opportunities>

SPREAD THE WORD

Please share this newsletter with your friends, family, and community. Like our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/facchicago> and visit our website at <https://rizalcenterchicago.org>. Email us at: hello@rizalcenterchicago.org for any comments or suggestions for improvement.

Manifesting transformation through art



By James Bulosan

"Art constitutes one of the rare locations where acts of transcendence can take place and have wide-ranging transformative impact"—hooks (Art on My Mind: Visual Politics)

This quote by bell hooks comes to mind when I reflect on my recent conversations with Jerry Clarito and Mae Lant. Back in 2019-2020 I had the pleasure of exhibiting my work in a solo show at the Rizal Center. The show focused on the complicated self-reflective process of reality testing when it comes to identity formation specifically for Filipino Americans. In the preparation of the exhibit and the opening I was left to ponder the existence of the Rizal Center at the time. Having an exhibit there was a crowning achievement in bringing my work outside of the traditional western art world's "white box" and back into the hands of the people the work was intended for and meant to connect with. My goal as a Filipino artist has always been to use my art as a way to build a platform to share and connect through personal narratives. This seemed to take on new meaning in the Rizal Center, which unbeknownst to me, was going through a rough patch of finding its voice and value while also navigating a complicated organizational battle behind the scenes.

Throughout the exhibit, and in talking with patrons, there was a sense of sadness for the physical state the Center was in, but also a feeling of potential for what it could be. Jerry and Mae are looking to tap into that very potential, not by looking back to return it to what it once was, but to evolve it and recenter the mission of the Rizal Center.

Their hope is to cultivate value for the center and its patrons alike in a more equitable manner. To do this they are looking at past assessments to better identify the needs of those who would be frequenting the center. This will be done in conjunction with a new evaluation to better find a baseline of the current state of the center and what is needed to advance it. This brings us back to the arts and hooks' quote at the beginning. Along with this transformation, Jerry, Mae, and the members of the legitimate Board see the potential of how art can be a thread that ties all the services together. Whether that is in direct programming with exhibitions, or in more "life as art" involvement through social services gained through liberation psychology approaches highlighting specific cultural needs. Inherent in this process is building a more community driven approach that involves youth, and in effect, connecting generations to establish a stronger investment in the foundation of the Center. This will provide a wraparound cultural experience where art can thrive and be seen and celebrated.

In order to make this happen there is a lot of work to be done. Enhancing communication with community members and the Rizal Center is key and will need to be broadened. Art can be the source for this. Using art as a visual language could help facilitate these conversations as well as further solidify the voices that tend to get lost. Like art, the Rizal Center is proving to be resilient and needed especially in this time of transition. I look forward to the developments and what the Rizal Center has in store **for us all**.

James is an Artist, Educator, and Art Therapist. He has taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where he served on the Internal Review Board and currently teaches at Benedictine University. His art therapy practice covers a wide range of populations and settings including hospitals and non profit organizations. He also serves as an Associate Editor of experimental research for the Journal of the American Art Therapy Association.

Rizal Center...looking back...forging forward



By Willi Buhay

Coining the title for this article is but a continuation of my sojourn writing on the life of Dr. Jose Rizal and the many brave men and women of our time. Rizal, the 35 year old single "Illustrado" who had the heart of a "paisano", was a man for all seasons with a vision for common good. He brought to life two foundational novels, several poems, and many letters defining the day to day life of oppression of the people of the motherland.

Over the years, I learned only sparingly the basics and terribly remiss in understanding the power of words Rizal used to free and win our bondage from foreign power and domination. Today, as I explore and exploit the edifice named Rizal Center, I learned that this landmark is the trophy and monument of our immigrant ancestors' vision. Through FACC, now known as FACGC, our pioneers purchased in 1974 the "home away from home" -- a well built concrete building located at 1332 W. Irving Park Road,

It's been over fifty years now and I am witnessing the passing of the torch. It had glorious years as well as days with dim light. Now, as I revisit the vision of our forebears, I challenge myself to continue to illuminate and make brighter the path for our young generation. Not that I will just let go of an inheritance but I will let them participate in the making of a stronger and empowered community of Filipino Americans amongst the many people of this great nation.

I will look back and learn from the words and works of great men and women who shaped our present and even our future. I will also open doors to the brilliant minds and skills of our people, young and old, so we may continue and contribute to many more outstanding years of the Rizal Center. I invite the community to join me, the board members, and the Bayanihan volunteer corps in the journey of enriching and actualizing Dr. Jose Rizal's teachings and making Rizal Center the true "home away from home" for our community members.

Willi was born and raised in Manila, Philippines. A graduate of San Beda University and the University of Santo Tomas (UST) from the College of Architecture and Fine Arts. He was the first Artistic Director for Design for the Folk Arts Theater, Cultural Center of the Philippines for 16 years. Served the FACGC - Rizal Center as member of the Board and Artist in residence for 29 years.



Home Away From Home: For more than five decades, Rizal Center played its unique role of providing Filipinx/a/os a "tambayan" (hang out), a club house, a cultural stage, a place for celebrating or a just safe space for "Kumustahan" (meet and greet). Now, this "home" is poised to realize the mission of our pioneers: to work in solidarity with Filipino Americans in promoting economic and socio-political empowerment anchored to the spirit of *bayanihan* (people working together).

What our volunteers say...



Solidarity "kodakan" (photo) to celebrate Aksyon (action), Bayanihan (people working together), Kapitbahayan (neighborly concern) and Damayan (mutual aid) during the Bayanihan Volunteer Corps orientation on February 19th. (Please see the related article by Geri Martinez-Benz on page 13). (Photo credit: Danielle)



My name is **Danielle or "L"** and I am a Filipinx-American community organizer and artist in the Chicagoland area, who is passionate about storytelling and Healing Justice. I am so grateful to have joined this volunteer orientation, and to take this time to mend the disconnects

we have felt through these various trials. It is a blessing to have shared in, and witnessed the new life that we are breathing back into the Rizal Center and to our broader Filipinx/a/o community today. And to have our older and younger generations join arm in arm for song and vision, and to kick-off the beginnings of this next generation.

Well, nice turn out. I hope many more FilAms will learn the history of our pioneers and how it intersects in owning Rizal Center. I will join volunteers to clean the building and to raise funds. ...**Vic, Skokie**

My hope for the Rizal Center is for it to once again become a cultural hub and safe space for our neighbors and community. It's been inspiring to witness the light in people's eyes when they realize not only how much meaning this place had for the community in the past, but also how much positive impact their engagement and contributions can have for the future. On a smaller scale, our community is organizing the Rizal Center to be a place for community, by community, with community, and that is just a magical moment in time to be present for.

...**Kaya, McKinley Park**

(Continued on next page)

What our volunteers say...



Volunteers in *KapitBisig* (linked arms) to visualize the power of Bayanihan - a community working together.

Super great to hear of Larry and John's efforts in revitalizing the walls, floors, and even the air of the Center. AFIRE did great lending support to the day. Seeing Tito Jerry, Tita Flor, Tita Sally, Tito Jimmy and Tita Cora together speaking on their experiences was amazing. Thank you all, and I'm looking forward to what more we can all build on what they and others have restarted for the community here.

Thanks, and can't wait till the next opportunity to help.

... Jonathan, West Town, Chicago

Seeing the progress in the maintenance of the Rizal Center, as well as attending the recent Bayanihan Volunteers' orientation, have been so heartwarming. As someone who has worked with AFIRE for the last five years, to see new young faces at the orientation and hearing their stories and desires for connection.

This couldn't be a more perfect time to rally and build a future (and a present!) together. The Chicagoland Filipino community has been needing a home base for its resource sharing and community building. Though I've witnessed so many more connections happening via social media in this time of the pandemic, I know that that isn't the most accessible form of outreach, especially for our elders.

I'm excited to continue expanding our volunteerism to include Filipinx/a/os of all generations, to share in the legacy of Filipinos here in Chicago. For myself, as a language teacher, I want to have a place to educate our youth about the various Philippine languages that our community speaks!

Kitakits :) Pasulong tayo!

... Andre, Uptown, Chicago

What our readers say...

"Thank you so much for sending this newsletter to me, I really appreciate it! I just read it and it's amazing. I loved it! I'm excited to read the future ones, I will share this with my friends, family, and others."

...Stacie, Vernon Hills

"This is wonderful! Thanks for sharing."

...Mary Rose, Harwoods Heights

"I read the whole newsletter. It is a marvelous start for a new Filipino newsletter. It shows transparency, honesty and integrity in the 21st century. It is refreshing to read new ideas from our new blood. The thread of ideas will definitely attract the new arrivals of Filipino immigrants and will bring back those old patrons who knew that they can turn to the Rizal Center as their "home away from home".

I am sure Rizal Center can offer a lot once its fully operational. I admire the new leaders for their patience and never ending volunteerism to restore Rizal Center and to open it again to the public. It can offer a space for Filipinos to work together (*bayanihan*) and turn to each other care (*damayan*) during a time of crisis.

It is a great start. I will fully support you in your endeavors for a functional Rizal Center. I will make copies of this publication for distribution."

...Jeanne, Park Ridge

"Very interesting. It's just like flipping thru newspaper pages."

...Emil, Chicago

"Kudos to the progressive FilAm community in Chicago! Bayanihan is great as a way to document the efforts to rebuild the Rizal Center and to disseminate what is happening in the Center and the community.

...Benjie, Manila

"The progress you have made is impressive! And your newsletter- well thought out. I like the vision statement you quoted - the function and purpose of the Rizal center:

"...this home is poised to realize the mission of our pioneers: to work in solidarity with Filipino Americans in promoting economic and socio-political empowerment anchored to the spirit of bayanihan (people working together)"

I'd like to send your newsletters to two groups that build community and a center: Tampa, Florida and Houston, Texas . Congratulations!"

...Josie, Hyde Park, Chicago

"I LOVE it! Congratulations, and keep up the great work...I'm so proud of Larry's commitment and of course, Tita Sally's and you, Tito Jerry, and all other volunteers...we see the potential vividly, it will take some work but we will pull up our sleeves and do what we can!

MABUHAY!!!!"

...Ginger, Chicago

"Looks exciting, especially the part about the economic development initiative reflecting "bayanihan". I am looking forward to see how this initiative hopefully roots itself in the solidarity economy. UIC's solidarity economy legal clinic at UIC and the Sustainable Economies Law Center (<https://www.theselc.org>) are great resources for entrepreneurs that Justice Cream uses.

Traditional business and nonprofit models replicate the power dynamics that led to the takeover of the center, so I think cultivating new structures/cooperatives rooted in horizontal power and mutual aid can prevent similar heartaches and lead to institutions of care for community."

....Hialy, Chicago

"Thank you, Jerry! You covered a lot! I hope to help more."

...Ester, Chicago

Ang Wika at Kulturang Filipino sa Chicago



Akda ni Ogot Sumulong

Ayon sa 2019 Pew Research Center, may mahigit na 145,000 na kababayan ang naninirahan dito sa metropolitan Chicago. Karamihan ay mga ipinanganak sa Pilipinas.

Maraming wika tayo dito. Filipino, English, Filipino-English, Taglish, Ilokano, Hiligaynon, Cebuano o Bikolano. Bukod diyan, naririnig sa usap-usapan ang “bardagulan”, “tsugi”, “marites”, “nega”, “swak na swak” na pumasok na sa kasalukuyang bokabularyo. Nakarating sila dito via You Tube, Instagram, Facebook o Tiktok. Maaari ring sinasalita sila ng mga kararating palang galing Pilipinas. Pero pansinin na di natin namamalayang di natin napalalaganap ang mga ito sa iba. Nang matanong ang isang kaibigan kung marunong ng Filipino ang mga pamangkin na dito na pinanganak, sambit niya'y nakakaintindi ng kaunti pero di sila maalam magsalita o garil naman kung may alam. Nang nagpasalubong ng isang aklat sa Filipino sa isang kaibigan, nahirapan siyang basahin dahil malalim ang mga salita para sa kanya. Ganoon din ang reaksyon ng isang gurong kaibigan nang sinulatan siya ng liham sa Filipino. Para bang matamlay ang paggamit ng mga wika natin dito. Kadalasa'y naiigpawan ng English at Taglish.

“...taglay nila lagi ang kaluluwa... ng lahing Filipino”

Marahil kung titingnan ang ating wika bilang isang saligang sangay ng ating kultura, ito ang naglalahad ng lahat ng pinagsamahan nating bilang kapwa Filipino.

Ang mga damayan, bayanihan, luksa, kasalan, binyagan at simbang gabi ay matibay na bahagi ng pamumuhay natin. Sa pakikibahagi, laksa-laksang eksena ang nagpapakulay ng ating gunita. Kinikilatis nito ang ating kabuhayan, talino, kakayahang, tagumpay, hirap, tuwa at lungkot. Dahil karamihan sa atin ay at least bilingual, madali tayong magkaintindihan kahit halo-halo pa ang gamit ng Filipino, Taglish, Spanglish, Filipino at English. Sa ganitong dasas paggamit ng wika, nabubuo natin ang kulturang Filipino-American na bahagi ng kulturang Amerikano, ng kulturang diaspora Filipino, at sa kalalaunan, ng kulturang pambansa. Ang wika ang nagpapasigla ng ating kultura.

Banggitin natin ang ilang lokal na naglagay ng spotlight sa kulturang Filipino kamakailan. Pag-aari ng mag-asawang Tim Flores at Genie Kwon ang **Kasama**, isang Filipino American restoran sa Ukrainian Village. Ito ay titingala sa estrellyang Michelin na nakamit nito dahil sa kanilang malikhaing paghahain ng makabagong pagkaing Filipino. Isa pang local na batikang mystery writer si Mia Manansala na may tatlong thrillers na nasulat (“Arsenic and Adobo”, “Homicide and Halo-halo” at “Blackmail and Bibingka”). Nagkamit siya ng papuri’t awards; at kinahiligang basahin ng marami ang kanyang mga akda. Pareho silang laki dito sa kulturang Filipino. Niyakap nila ang kulturang Amerikano. Sa kanilang larangan, isinigaw nila ang tinig Filipino kipkip ang mga kuwento, pinagmulan, langkap at lasa ng bawat putaheng inihain nila sa lamesa at sa mga pagina ng aklat. Marami pang kagaya nila ang may ganitong pagpapahayag sa ating komunidad sa larangan ng pulitika, periodiko, negosyo, batas, medisina at edukasyon.

Mahalaga ang magkatuwang na wika’t kultura sa buhay natin dito. Mahaluan man sila ng iba-ibang impluwensiya, sangkap o salita, taglay nila lagi ang kaluluwa ng ating pagkilalan bilang isang lahing Filipino.

Si Ogot Sumulong ay Retirado. Interesado sa nagbabagong anyo at kasalukuyang paggamit ng ating wika at panitikan. Nahihilig din sa mga paksain hinggil sa sinaunang kasaysayan ng bayang tinubuan.

Tumutok sa kalusugan ng komunidad



Interesado ka ba sa paghubog ng kalusugan ng iyong komunidad?

Naghahanap ang Filipino American Council of Greater Chicago (FACGC) ng mga voluntaryong lalahok sa isang grupo sa pagtuon tungkol sa programa sa kalusugan ng puso ng Pilipino katuwang ang Koalisyon sa Kalusugan ng Asyano (Asian Health Coalition, AHC)!

\$75 bawat kalahok!

Para maging kwalipikado, kailangang:

- ♥ Maging 18 taong gulang pataas ka
- ♥ Kinikilala ka bilang Pilipinx/a/o

Lokasyon:

Rizal Center

1332 W Irving Park Road,
Chicago, IL 60613

Tagal:

~90 minuto – 2 oras

Para lumahok, mangyaring makipag-ugnayan sa:

Mae Lant

✉ mdlant@yahoo.com
📞 219-669-4829



FACGC

Ang programang ito ay naglalayon na masuri at mapabuti ang kurikulum sa “The Heart Truth and Healthy Heart, Healthy Family” ng National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, at mga pansuportang materyales upang matiyak na ang mga mapagkukunan ay may kaugnayan para sa edukasyon sa sakit sa puso sa komunidad ng mga Pilipino. Ang mga Filipino Americans ay kabilang sa tatlong pinakamalaking komunidad ng Asian Americans sa Estados Unidos, at mayroon silang mas mataas na ranggo ng mga kadalilan ng panganib sa sakit sa puso, kabilang ang hypertension at diabetes, kaysa sa iba pang mga subgroup. Ang pagsusuri ng kurikulum ay napapahanon sa kadalilanang may mahigit nang isang dekada mula ng unang ginamit and kurikulum.

The Legacy Beneath My Wings



By Mae Lant

The Filipino American Community has a very rich legacy that at present has impacted the lives of many of us; actions that had taken place in the past impacting what we would like to achieve now and in the future to come.

Practicing nursing for the last 47 years forces me to look back from my younger years, my aspirations in life, and what thought I can do to be a productive member of society. My father is a prominent physician in our town who helped a lot of patients and their families towards health and healing. I am remember assisting him, and riding in his Miya pet motorcycle doing visits crossing rivers, climbing hills, and walking distances on rice paddies and tobacco fields to provide the care to the sick and infirm, most of the time for free.

“I learned a lot from him not only because of his medical knowledge but also the dedication and love he has for his patients”

It is true that a physician's first love and first family are his patients. As I am writing this article, I remember the words of wisdom which I feel I should share with you all.

He emphasized to me that education is an important aspect of success. He said that education is a treasure I must always carry everywhere I go. I gained confidence. I got empowered and most of all education enhanced my life as a person.

My father taught me to set a goal in my life and an ambition that helped me faced the challenges that life brought me. I have developed courage, and determination in pursuing my aspirations and also seeing the attendant successful outcomes. I have put energy not just to help myself but also to help others who are in need. I know that God's Blessings followed all my effort, twice as much or even more than I have exerted.

Dad passed away last year, and with his passing his words of wisdom are a legacy. His generosity, caring and dedication will be remembered by a lot of people he helped in our province of Ilocos Norte.

On the same token, I am sure that in early 1950s our pioneers who organized the FACGC had thoughts and aspirations to be of service to the Filipino American Community. They mustered their will to organize the community and to have a home away from home for them was urgent; and united they made it to reality, a building where everyone were proud of, a center where gatherings, cultural, historical and political issues albeit were debated and discussed.

Fast forward today, the members of FACGC's Board of Directors would like to see that the young generation would come forward to carry the torch of unity and understanding in the Filipino American community. It is time for us all to keep the torch lit and shining. The young generation is our inspiration, and the wind that is pushing us forward to evolve and change to act, to unite, to care and to motivate others to be a part of a whole. Mabuhay!

Mae came to the US in 1979 and finished her Post Graduate Course in Psychiatric Nursing at University of Illinois, College of Nursing in 1989. She has been practicing as a registered nurse for 47 years. Currently, she works for PrimeCare Home Health Services and Excellent Home Health, Inc. as director/consultant for quality assurance performance improvement (QAPI). She has been an active volunteer at Rizal Center since 1987 when she founded the *Kultura Pilipina* Dance Company of Chicago. She hopes, “to see the revival of appreciation of Filipino folk dances as a medium of cultural integration with the diverse Chicago's cultural landscape.”

The Fate of the Rizal Center as a Personal Responsibility



By Geraldine Martinez-Benz

The first time I read about the Rizal Community Center was almost 20 years ago when I arrived here in Chicago. It was under a different name back then. I remember being very interested in it because, as a visual artist, I was always looking for possible venues for an art exhibit or for holding summer art workshops. I never really got to visit, in fact when I attended the volunteer meeting last February 19th it was my first time stepping inside the place that I have heard so much about.

There were 30 volunteers present that day, 20 of us were new recruits. From stories I heard of the center being in disrepair I was expecting the worst but surprisingly, for me, the auditorium actually looked good. And later I learned this was mostly the handiwork of two volunteers (Larry Leopoldo and Chris Saroza) who did amazing in restoring much of it.

"There are close to 150,000 Filipinos in Illinois, imagine the possibilities if we can tap even just 1% to help with restoring this place of so much history?"

During the meeting I learned that Sunday's new volunteers went there for different reasons; a mom brought her three young children hoping for them to get to know more about the filipino culture and the Philippines, another came to reconnect to the place where she had many fond memories of when she was a child, another one just moved to Chicago from another state a year ago hoping to meet other filipinos in the community, and a young couple who were

passing by noticed the building with the name Rizal on it just walked in to see how they can help.

Obviously there is a need for a place where we can build a community especially for the younger Filipino-American generation who are in search of their identity, heritage and a sense of belonging. For me personally as the founder of the Sinag filipino-american art collective in greater Chicago, it would be an exhibit and art workshop space for fil-am artists from Illinois and a venue for young fil-ams like my teenage son to mingle with others whose experiences they can relate to.

I feel that saving this center, the only place in Illinois that belongs to filipinos, is a personal responsibility for every one of us who are proud to be one. Like it or not it is a reflection of us and our community if we let it fall to neglect. As a few pointed out to me there are museums for Cambodians (Illinois population of 5,000) and Haitians (population 6,000) here in Chicago, why not for filipinos? We know a lot of those who were born here travel thousands of miles to the Philippines in search of their roots, but if we have a place like the Rizal Community Center to welcome them, to hobnob, to learn about our culture, the language, the food...maybe there won't be any need to go that far.

Many years ago as a new immigrant I wasn't sure if there was a place for me at the Rizal center where people seem to already know each other and have their own circle. But as Jerry Clarito told me in the meeting, we have to lobby for ourselves and let them know how the Rizal Community Center can benefit us personally and our family. From there we can work together in making space we can call our own for every filipino-american in greater Chicago and even Illinois.

Geraldine "Geri" Martinez-Benz is a Bachelor of Fine Arts graduate with a major in Painting from the University of the Philippines – Cebu City. She has shared her love for the visual arts through several summer art workshops in the Philippines which she organized and facilitated. She has exhibited in the Philippines, Chicago and Evanston. She is the founder of Sinag Filipino-American Artists of Greater Chicago.

P R E S S R E L E A S E



Ginger Leopoldo (312) 956-9489
CHICAGO, IL

CIRCA Pintig presents Daryo's All-American Diner, a new play about family and friends coming together in times of crisis!

The pandemic brought the entire world to its knees and the challenges that it poses after a two-year wrath unravels the delicate fabric upon which our moral and cultural values find its true humanity. For its 32nd theater season, CIRCA Pintig, the Filipino American community arts organization, brings to the stage the story of the Daryo family in the fictional town of Lakeside, Illinois and how a tragic incident transforms their sense of humanity and community.

Written by Conrad A. Panganiban, Daryo's All American Diner is a new play about resilience seen through the lens of a Filipino family who struggles to keep a family business open at the height of the pandemic. May, the 40-year old daughter who manages the diner is torn between keeping the business afloat despite mounting expenses or sell the business altogether. As she tiptoes on navigating these choices, her mother April and her African American surrogate aunt Alberta suffer the brunt of racial hatred. May is forced to revisit her decision as family and friends redefine what binds them together as a community. The play sets the tone for how a traumatic act of violence can lead to an act of grace when Daryo family and friends find new joy in honoring the legacy of Augusto Daryo, the late father whose culinary prowess makes Daryo's All American Diner 'all American'.

Directed by Luis Pascasio, the play finds its strength through a multiracial assembly of characters creating a montage on which to view the ongoing anti-Asian hate from a perspective that engages cross-cultural healing and understanding.

Cast includes Heather Jencks, Ginger Leopoldo, RJ Silva, Cary Shoda, Amanda Payne and KC Khan with music and sound design by Demetrio Maguigad and set design by Larry Leopoldo. In partnership with the Chicago Danztheatre Ensemble (CDE).

The play is double billed with CDE's production of The Wasteland and will go on stage on May 5-6, 12-13 and 19-20, Friday-Saturday, 8pm at The Auditorium of Ebenezer Lutheran Church, 1650 W. Foster in Chicago.

This production of CIRCA Pintig is supported in part by Asian Giving Circle, Crossroads Fund, DCASE City Arts Grant, Illinois Arts Council, an agency of the National Endowment for the Arts, Asian Improv aRts Midwest, and Resist.

For tickets and more inquiries, visit www.circapintig.org or email GingerLeopoldo, Executive Director at ginger@circapintig.org.