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THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNIT MAGAZINE

LEAGUE

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2018

VOL. 2 NO. 1 PHP 195.00

**MALOLOS, BULACAN
SOARS TO
GREATER HEIGHTS**

**PROVINCE OF RIZAL
THE ROAD TO
COMPETITIVENESS**

**TUBURAN, CEBU
COFFEE CAPITAL
OF THE VISAYAS**

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PRIMED FOR BUSINESS**

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FIRST ANNIVERSARY ISSUE



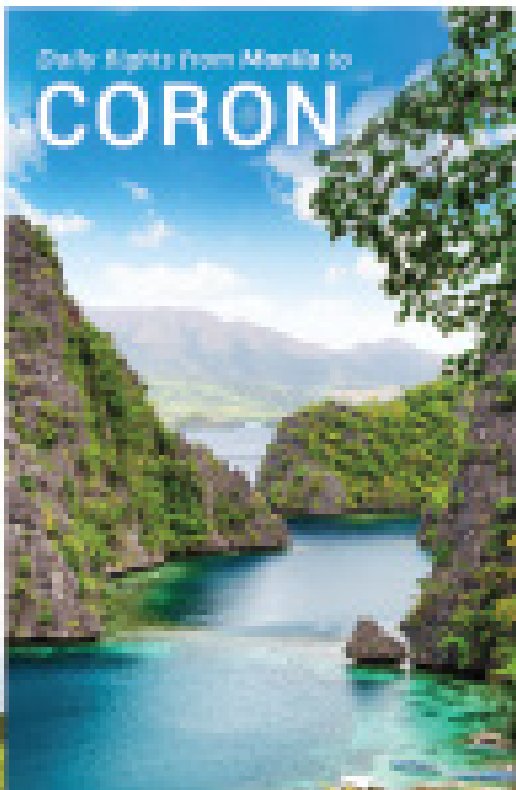
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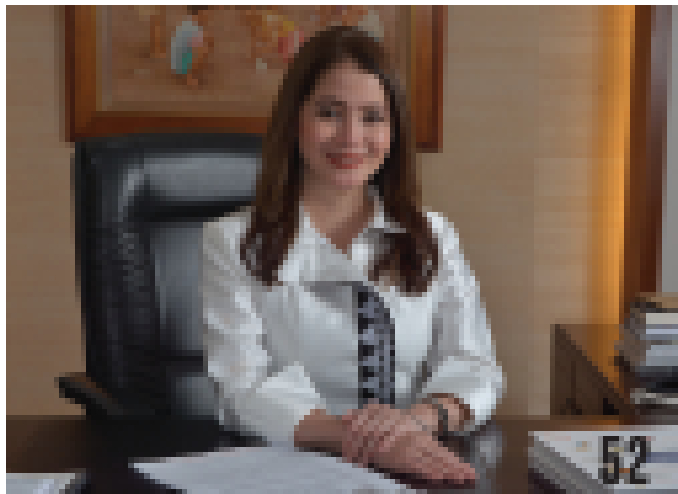
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1 HOUR 15 MIN
PROVISIONS SECTION

1 HOUR 15 MIN
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1 HOUR
CHARTER TO MEMBERS

FEATURES

1 HOUR
MEMBERSHIP

1 HOUR 15 MIN
**TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION IN THE
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1 HOUR 15 MIN
CONSTRUCTION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1 HOUR 15 MIN
CONSTRUCTION & DESIGN

1 HOUR
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1 HOUR
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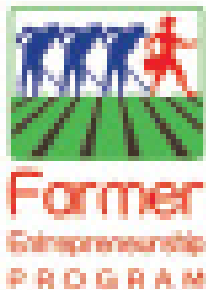
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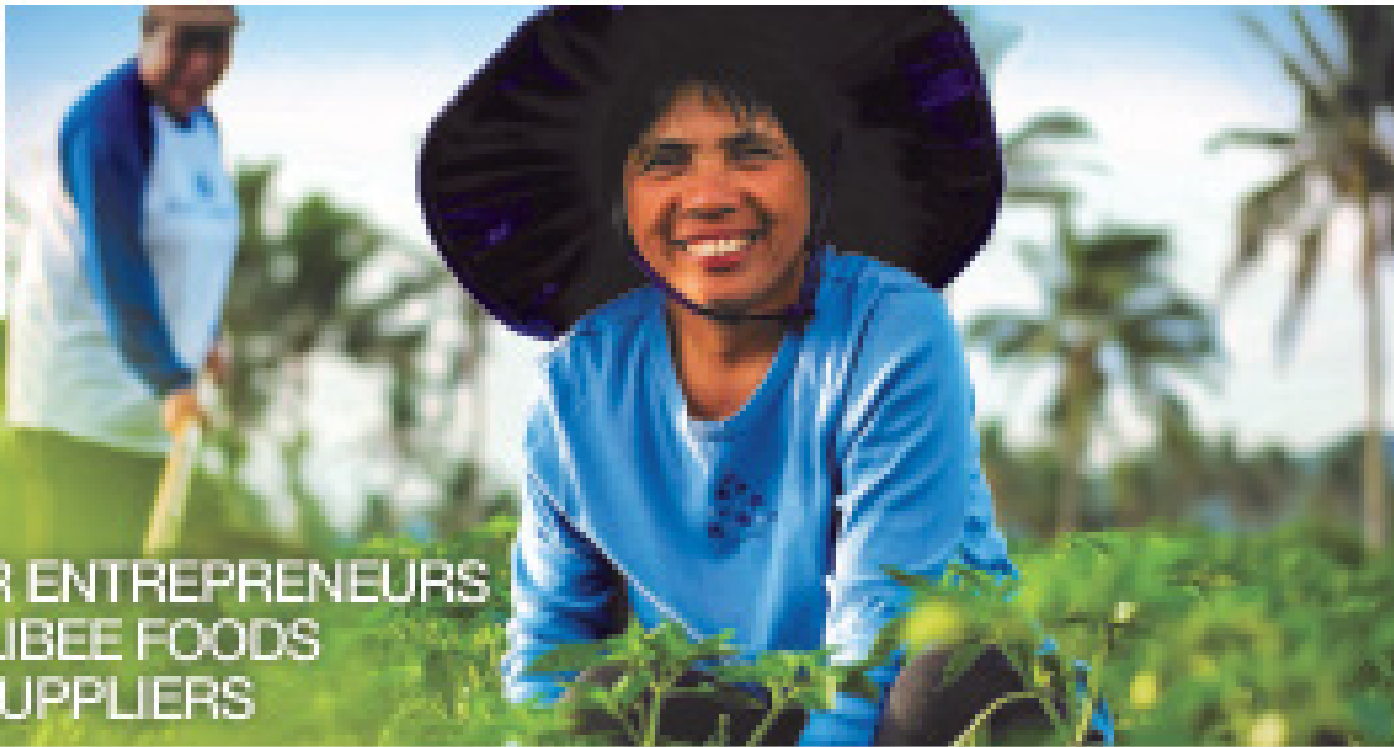


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Farmer
Entrepreneurship
PROGRAM



FARMER ENTREPRENEURS AS JOLLIBEE FOODS CORP. SUPPLIERS

Filipino farmers work hard every day to provide food for the country. But the uncertainty of who will buy their produce and at what price affects their ability to make a living for their families.

This is where the Farmer Entrepreneurship Program (FEP) comes in. FEP enables qualified farmers to directly supply institutional markets such as Jollibee Foods Corporation

(JFC), assuring them of regular market and income.

Since 2008, Jollibee Group Foundation and its partners have built the capacities of farmers to meet the standards and requirements of food companies while ensuring they make a profit. With FEP, the vegetables needed to produce JFC's delicious burgers, rice meals, pizzas and pastas, now come directly from farmers.

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A Reckoning and an Aspiration

A Greek philosopher once said: “No man ever steps into the same river twice, for it is not the same river and he is not the same man.”

A year after we published the very first issue of LEAGUE, we, the men and women who make up the publishing and editorial team of the magazine, concede that we are no longer the same people who met a year ago at a coffee shop in Makati. Not that we have lost or replaced anyone from the original team, but that we are now more comfortable in our skin; we now have a clearer understanding of our mission.

LEAGUE was conceptualized at a time when magazine readership was on a worldwide decline. Bookstores were removing magazines from their shelves. Revered magazine brands started closing down as readership shifted from print to the Internet. Yet one year later since we started, we are thriving, gaining more sponsors and subscribers. What did we do right?

The first would be a strict adherence to its vision. LEAGUE set out to be a magazine that promotes the virtues of good governance, which it sought to do by highlighting the best practices of leaders of local government units and their leaders. Everything we did flowed from that vision. The second is that we have the right blend of people; it has been a pleasure to come up with a magazine with our editorial staff, a group of serious people who do not take themselves too seriously.

Buoyed by this small measure of success, we march on, celebrating not the all too common politics of division that is so prevalent in mainstream media, but honoring the efforts of leaders who are doing right by their constituents, so that their experiences serve as inspiration for like-minded officials. It is our hope that the best practices we feature in this magazine become, over time, the norm among chiefs of local government units.

Once again, we thank you for your continued support.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and curves.

Atty. Javier P. Flores
Publisher



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SECURITY GUARD LEADS BAGUIO'S OUTSTANDING CITIZENS

In celebrating this year's Baguio Day, the Society of Outstanding Citizens of Baguio (SOCOB) had chosen five men and women to be awarded as the city's best. Leading the laudable roster was the courteous security guard, Guillermo Battad Cortes, who was nominated by the owner of the Insular Life compound in the city's McDonalds food chain branch. Although he's a college undergraduate, Cortes has been known for his courageous personality and had continuously received positive comments from his employers for his work ethic. He consistently returns items left by customers in his workplace, including a bag containing P1 million, which was left in Maharlika center. His honesty and dedication to his profession are the main reasons why he was chosen to be a part of the city's top award.

This year's other awardees were Rosalind Rusgal Camat, who is the caregiver for her husband; teacher-leader Ester Kiw-is Lilitit; highly-skilled nurse, Generosa Boado Carbonell; hospital consultant in surgery, Jose Bugayong, Jr.; philanthropist, Jose Ong Tajan; businessman, Rolando Veneracion Villanueva; engineering professor, Bonifacio Ilao dela Peña; Teresita Marcelo for culture and arts; and Jane Cosalan for community service.



MARGIELYN DIDAL CLAIMS FOURTH GOLD FOR PH IN ASIAN GAMES

The 19-year-old athlete, Margielyn Didal, brought pride to the Philippines when she secured the country's fourth gold medal in the 2018 Asian Games. With a total score of 30.4 in the women's street skateboard competition, Didal barely broke a sweat as she stood out from the seven other competitors at the JSC SkateBoard Stadium in Palembang, Indonesia. She started her humble skateboarding journey in Cebu and continuously rose to become the country's representative with her exceptional talent and free-spirited yet determined personality. After this, expect to see the young athlete to possibly appear in the Southeast Asian Games or the 2020 Olympics. With the country ranking 16th among the 35 countries that participated in the regional sports meet and earning its 17th medal overall, Didal has proven that skateboarding is more than just performing tricks but also an entirely different world of art and sports that gives joy to everyone.



AFFECTED BY TYPHOONS HENRY, INDAY, AND JOSIE RECEIVES THREE-MONTH ADVANCE PENSION

SSS offers a three-month advance pension to the existing SSS retiree, disability, and survivor pensioners and employees' compensation disability and survivor pensioners who live in the calamity areas that were identified by the National Risk and Reduction Management Council (NDRRMC). The advance pension, however, is not to exceed three months at any time. Requirements like a properly accomplished application form, valid ID cards and documents, authorization letter and valid IDs from the pensioner, and photocopy of representative's ID, are needed for the processing of the three-month advance for the pensioners affected by tropical cyclones Henry, Inday, and Josie. Applications can be filed at any SSS branch, from August 16 to



FREE GUIDED TREE WALKS TO SAVE THE ARROCEROS FOREST PARK

Considered to be the "last lung" of the capital city of the Philippines, the Arroceros Forest Park is home to 61 different tree varieties such as Bagras, Bitao, Narra, Molave, Mahogany, and Red Balete; 8,000 ornamental plants; and 10 different bird species. Located between the Metropolitan Theater and the Pasig River, the forest park that was designed by landscape architect, Wilfrido Dizon, and the Bulacan Garden Corporation may soon lose its charm. Rumor has it that the park will soon be demolished to give way to a gym, a mall, or a condominium for the sake of urban development. Concerned citizens have made efforts to help save it. A free guided tree walk at the historical forest park was hosted by the Philippine Native Plants Conservation Society, Inc. last July 22, while volunteers from Winner Foundation filed a petition to turn the last remaining forest park in Manila into a Tree Park.

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DAVAO CITY HOSTS ITS 33RD KADAYAWAN FESTIVAL

Davao City Mayor, Inday Sara Duterte, thanked everyone for the success of the 33rd Kadayawan Festival. The festival is a way of showing appreciation for the “gods of generosity,” as people filled the city with colorful displays and performances. Topping the week-long festival were the Indak-Indak contestants who performed a depiction of the values of Davaoños. Thirty-seven vibrant floats took part in the Pamulak Kadayawan Float Parade. Winners were the Kisan Lu and Development, Inc. in Dako Category (big float), Teleperformance for the Gamay category (small float), and the Davao Horse Club in the Lahi category. Meanwhile, the Cosplay Kadayawan Competition featured eagle-inspired costumes, while first-time participants, Asuncion Drum Beaters, won the Pitik Kadayawan Drumming Contest. Thousands of locals and tourists enjoyed the festival, which Mayor Inday declared as being the biggest Kadayawan ever.



NIA TO BUILD P11.2-B MEGA DAM PROJECT IN ILOILO CITY

At the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) Complex in Quezon City, NIA Western Visayas and Korean firm, Daewoo Engineering and Construction Co. Ltd., signed the contract for the P11.2 billion Jalaur River Multi-Purpose Project (JRMP) II in Calinog, Iloilo. The signing was attended by Sen. Franklin Drilon and Iloilo Governor, Arthur Defensor Sr. NIA is currently hiring an estimated 17,000 workers for the construction. Interested jobseekers for laborer, masonry, welder, and driver positions can go to the municipal hall said Calinog Mayor, Alex Centena. The multi-billion dam project is funded by the Export-Import Bank of Korea (Eximbank) with a P9 billion loan. Constructed to boost the city’s rice production, it is expected to be completed after six years and will be the biggest dam outside of Luzon covering three dams, namely the Jalaur High Dam, Afterbay Dam, and Alibutan Catch Dam.



FIRST 'EXPLORER ENCOUNTERS' CONFERENCE PRESENTED BY MASUNGI GEORESERVE

In partnership with the National Geography Society-Asia and the Forest Foundation Philippines, the Masungi Georeserve Foundation will present the first ever Explorer Encounters conference this September at Bonifacio Global City. The conference aims to be a helpful platform that would provide discussions, knowledge-sharing, and community building regarding mainstream environment conservation in the Philippines with both local and international experts and organizations. The event will bring together a total of 80 storytellers for their workshops and expert forums which will be a way for the participants to create networks, join expert talks, and be taught about advance conservation through storytelling. Organizers have invited molecular biologist, Prasenjeet Yadav; international photographer, Hannah Reyes-Morales; ethologist, Alessandro Ponzio; and senior director, Yannick Kuehl, to be the event’s speakers, workshop facilitators, and performers. International photographer, Paco Guerrero, is tasked to host the event, while leading journalist, Atom Araullo, will moderate the explorer talks.



HOUSE APPROVES OF GRANTING 100-DAY MATERNITY LEAVE

The House of Representatives approved on its second reading the 100-day paid maternity leave proposal to both government and private sector workers which is sponsored by Bagong Henerasyon Representative, Bernadette Herrera Dy, the chairperson of the women and gender equality committee. House Bill 4113, or the 100-Day Maternity Leave Law, seeks for employees to have an option to increase the number of days to 100, contrary to the existing law which only has 60 to 78 days of paid leaves depending on the delivery procedure. In the case of an employee whose employment is concluded, maternity leave would still take place if birth or miscarriage happens not more than 15 days after it’s terminated. When availing of the maternity benefits as a member of the Social Security System, the bill requires the employee to have paid at least three monthly contributions in the 12-month period immediately before giving birth. If approved on the third reading, the proposed maternity bill still needs to be reconciled with conflicting provisions by the two chambers before President Rodrigo Duterte signs it into law.

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HEALING THE WOUNDS OF WAR

Understanding and sharing a common history is a powerful tool in building meaningful relationships between nations

BY MARCO NICANOR
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MANUEL GENEROSO

The course of human history has been, and will continue to be, painted with the conflict of war and its aftermath. Whether it be in the guise of fighting for the greater good, or serving the greed of the powerful few, truth remains that war is a crime against humanity—it destroys not only the lives of those involved but also wounds and affects the generations thereafter.

Last July, the 11th leg of the series of the International Conference of NGOs on History and Peace was held in Metro Manila with the theme “Historical Justice and a Peaceful Community in East Asia.” It was organized by History NGO Forum for Peace in East Asia (Seoul, Korea), Philippine World War II Memorial Foundation, and Hunters-ROTC Historical Society and was participated in, by the Philippines, Korea, Japan, China, Mongolia, Vietnam, Thailand, and several European countries.

The discussion’s takeoff point: How do we create communities of nations that live in solidarity and cooperation, capable of avoiding conflict and war? First, we must help heal the

wounds of the war by serving historical justice to the victims of war and give closure.

Understanding and sharing a common history is a powerful tool in building meaningful relationships between nations. At the conference, there were discussions about shared norms and civil society charter across Asia, historical justice for comfort women during World War II, territorial issues and disputes, and sustainable peace and international cooperation. These were not easy panel discussions; old wounds still sting when exposed to open air, and there were several animated exchanges. But the fact that these are being addressed and an avenue is presented to air grievances is a move toward international relationship building.

The impact of initiatives such as these from the NGOs, the academe, collective professionals, and concerned ordinary citizens creates a positive force. It is also the continuing hope of the conference that the exchange of ideas, history, and perspective would nurture the insight and wisdom of each of the nations, to give justice to the wronged, and to ensure that the present learn from the bitter lessons of the past. | ■

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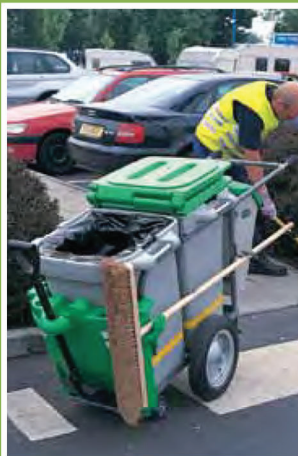
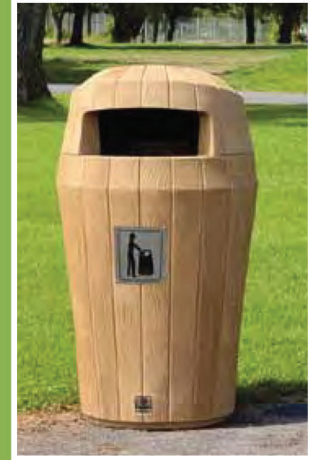
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GOVERNANCE

WE ARE ONE!



LEAGUE Magazine proudly marked its first anniversary with a grand celebration at Marco Polo Manila, attended by over 200 guests, comprised of local government leaders as well as media and some of society's movers and shakers. Among those who attended were Quezon City Vice Mayor Joy Belmonte, Misamis Oriental Governor Bambi Emano, Makati City First District Rep. Monsour Del Rosario and LEAGUE's founder and now AGM of Laguna Lake Development Authority Gener Dungo. Special guest, actor Tom Rodriguez, also shared a few words commemorating LEAGUE's milestone.

In addition to giving recognition to those who had graced the covers of LEAGUE's past issues, publisher Atty. Javy Flores also proudly introduced the publication's newest venture, LEAGUE Online News, which brings local government news straight to your screens.

"Through LEAGUE magazine and LEAGUE Online News, we commit to our responsibility of providing a venue for people to participate in nation-building. We thank all our readers and partners in being part of our journey, and soon our future. We shall not disappoint and we promise to keep innovating in the years to come," shared Atty. Flores.









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COMPETITIVENESS IN FOCUS

Ranking the country's LGU units on their capacity for economic growth

In the 4th Regional Competitiveness Summit held August 16, 2018, the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) Competitiveness Bureau released the 2018 Cities and Municipalities Competitiveness Index (CMCI). Through this index, DTI aims to advocate and build a competitive governance paradigm of local government units (LGU) in order to raise the overall competitiveness of the country.

Competitiveness indicates the ability of a nation to maintain high rates of economic growth and productivity with sustained employment. More competitive economies tend to be able to achieve higher levels of income for their citizens.

The index utilizes data on four pillars composed of over 60 indicators. These four pillars are:

ECONOMIC DYNAMISM

This is usually associated with activities that create stable expansion of business and industries and higher employment.

GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

This refers to the quality and reliability of government services and government support for effective and sustainable productive expansion.

INFRASTRUCTURE

This is composed of the physical building blocks that connect, expand, and sustain a locality and its surroundings to enable the provision of goods and services.

RESILIENCY

This is the capacity of a locality to facilitate businesses and industries to create jobs, raise productivity, and increase the incomes of citizens over time despite of the shocks and stresses it encounters.

2018 MOST COMPETITIVE PROVINCES

Rizal
Laguna
Davao Del Norte
Cavite

Sarangani
Cotabato
Sultan Kudarat

South Cotabato
Batangas
Bataan

2018 MOST COMPETITIVE CITIES

OVERALL

Quezon City
Manila
Pasig
Davao
Makati
Pasig
Cagayan De Oro
Cebu
Bacolod
Naga

Makati
Manila
Quezon City
Davao City
Kidapawan
Marikina

INFRASTRUCTURE

ECONOMIC DYNAMISM

Quezon City
Pasig
Davao
Makati
Manila
Mandao
Pasig
Cebu
Bacolod
Taguig

Manila
Quezon City
Davao
Pasig
Bacolod
Cagayan De Oro
Cebu
Pasig
Makati
Pangasinan

RESILIENCY

GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

Taguig
Pasig
Iloilo
San Juan

Tanauan (Batangas)
Calapan
Davao
Cebu
Makati
Cagayan De Oro
Pasig
Iriga
Marikina
Naga

2018 MOST COMPETITIVE MUNICIPALITIES

OVERALL

Santo Tomas, Batangas
Jagna, Bohol
Carmona, Cavite
Calamba, Rizal
Loon, Bohol
Talibon, Bohol
Rosario, Cavite
Medina, Pampanga
San Jose, Occidental Mindoro
La Trinidad, Benguet

Daliwag, Bulacan
Sibuyan, Occidental Mindoro
Binangonan, Rizal
Kalibo, Aklan
Machol, Bataan
Guagua, Pampanga
Angono, Rizal

ECONOMIC DYNAMISM

Pura, Tarlac
Polangui, Albay
Santa Barbara, Iloilo
Carmona, Cavite
Olongapo, Romblon
Nagtipunan, Quirino
Angono, Rizal
Lugait, Misamis Oriental
Medina, Misamis Oriental
Bako, Mountain Province

INFRASTRUCTURE

Cabiao, Nueva Ecija
Taytay, Rizal
Bataan, Bohol
Malab, Surigao del Norte
Sierra Bullones, Bohol
Lanao, Maguindanao
Lorico, Agusan Del Sur
Mauab, Sarangani
Binangonan, Rizal
Malay, Aklan

GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

Malay, Aklan
Calamba, Rizal
Taytay, Rizal

RESILIENCY

Calamba, Rizal
Taytay, Rizal
Pura, Tarlac
Carmona, Cavite
Malay, Aklan
Binangonan, Rizal
Kalibo, Aklan
Angono, Rizal
San Jose, Antique
Cabiao, Nueva Ecija

THE ROAD TO PEACE

Finding a lasting solution to the conflict in Mindanao was one of President Rodrigo Duterte's campaign promises in 2016. As the country's first president to hail from Mindanao, he is determined to realize the great development potential of the island, which, for decades now, has been lost to the ongoing fight of the Muslims for self-determination. The Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) was signed on July 26 this year, and the road to peace finally looks bright.

President Duterte recognizes that Moros desire "historical justice." A large part of Mindanao, home to the Muslims, was able to resist Western colonial rule for hundreds of years. But at the beginning of the 20th century, they were pushed into certain areas as a minority through the US military campaign and the resettlement projects of the Christian-dominated national government. Moros were radicalized by these threats, which were later on exacerbated by then President Marcos, who was allegedly responsible for the killing of 11 Muslim military trainees in Corregidor. This prompted the creation of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) that sought the establishment of the Bangsamoro nation through an armed rebellion.

Previous administrations have attempted to attain peace in the south, but to no avail. The creation of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in 1989 under former President Corazon Aquino has been called a failure, marred by continued conflict in the area and aggravated by

Will the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) solve the woes of Muslim Mindanao?

BY JOHN LEE CANDELARIA



Illustration
by Luciano
Sardea Ramirez

corruption and political dynasties taking advantage of the situation. The grievances and sentiments of the Muslims in the region worsened. Calls for true autonomy and self-governance heightened in an area that has remained poor because of corruption and unsafe because of the ongoing conflict.

In 2011, former President Benigno Aquino III, recognized that the ARMM is a "failed experiment" and sought to go back to the negotiation table with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to sign the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) in 2012. In 2014, the government and the

MILF signed the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), which formed the basis of the Bangsamoro Basic Law proposed in Congress. While everything seemed on track, questions of constitutionality were raised, and the unfortunate killing of the 44 members of the police Special Action Force in an encounter with the MILF and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters in Mamasapano, Maguindanao in 2015 also killed the BBL; the 16th Congress adjourned in February 2016 without passing the law.

The BOL, which is the iteration of the BBL in the Duterte Administration, sought to reconcile versions of the proposed measure that were acceptable to the government and the rebel groups. With this law, the creation of the Bangsamoro political entity that would be more autonomous than ARMM will proceed.

The ARMM was a result of the peace negotiations between the government and the MNLF. The MILF, a breakaway group of the MNLF, touts the BOL as a more inclusive attempt at peace in the south, since both factions will work to achieve a unified government in the region.

The new political entity under the BOL is called the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Its territories will consist of the ARMM area (Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Lanao del Sur, and Maguindanao), while six towns in Lanao del Norte and 39 *barangays* in North Cotabato will have to vote in a plebiscite to determine if the people want to belong to Bangsamoro. Other contiguous areas may opt in, provided that there is a local government resolution or a petition where at least 10 percent of registered voters want to join the plebiscite.

The management of its resources, such as inland waters (especially Lake Lanao) will be left to the jurisdiction of the Bangsamoro, and they are free to pursue their political, economic, social, and cultural development.

The political structure will be parliamentary-democratic, with the Bangsamoro Parliament being the highest organ of government. The people will elect an 80-member parliament that represents different parties, legislative districts, and sectors such as the indigenous peoples. The parliament will elect a chief minister and two deputy chief ministers among themselves, with the chief minister appointing his own cabinet. Shari'ah courts shall have jurisdiction over cases that exclusively involve Muslims.

The Bangsamoro will have an automatic allocation equivalent to five percent of the net

national internal revenue of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) and the Bureau of Customs (BOC), while the region's share in government revenue taxes, fees, charges, and taxes on natural resources will be at 75 percent. Additionally, the national government will allocate P5 billion to the Bangsamoro annually for a period of 10 years for the rehabilitation of conflict affected areas.

The national government maintains the responsibility for security and defense of the Bangsamoro, with the Philippine National Police (PNP) organizing, maintaining, and supervising a Police Regional Office for law enforcement.

The transition will proceed after the plebiscite to be managed by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) to ratify the BARMM. President Duterte will appoint the members of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) that include the incumbent officials of the ARMM and several sectoral representatives. Duterte will also appoint an interim Chief Minister among the BTA members who will organize an interim Cabinet. The transition will last until the first local elections to be held in 2022, after which the BTA will be dissolved upon the assumption of the elected Bangsamoro Parliament.

The road to peace, however, remains torturous. There are huge differences and divisions among Moros that need to be settled, doubts on the rebels truly decommissioning their arms, and the poverty that continues to mire Moros in the region, among others.

There is also the challenge of getting the more prosperous areas in Mindanao, such as Cotabato and Lanao del Norte, to join the Bangsamoro, since many of these are wary of the dominance of the MILF leadership in the new political entity.

According to surveys, majority of Filipinos also remain largely neutral to the creation of the Bangsamoro, with many from Mindanao uncertain about the prospect of peace in the region. It is also certain that critics of the BOL will bring the question of constitutionality of the measure to court, since it will have implications to the integrity of the Philippine territory.

There is also concern with how the administration's project to shift to federalism will impact the BOL. Supporters of President Duterte tout Bangsamoro as a good test case for federalism, while the critics argue that Bangsamoro itself is proof that self-governance is possible without shifting the entire country to a federal form of government.

For now, the road ahead might be seem arduous, but the BOL certainly makes the prospect for peace in Mindanao a lot more realistic. Our neighboring countries and many international organizations and regional blocs have hailed the BOL as a landmark achievement of the Duterte administration.

The administration, then, must not rest on its laurels just yet, and proceed with the hard work of making the dreams of Bangsamoro a reality for the Moro peoples of Mindanao. ■

John Lee Candelaria is a graduate student at the Graduate School for International Development and Cooperation, Hiroshima University. He is the author of the book *Readings in Philippine History*.

IN PURSUIT OF AN INDEPENDENT PHILIPPINE FOREIGN POLICY

BY HERMAN JOSEPH S. KRAFT

Philippine foreign policy has attracted quite a bit of attention in the international scene with the sudden turnabout in the way that the Administration of President Rodrigo R. Duterte approached foreign policy. Three points have attracted attention that seemed to characterize this pursuit. First, was the expressed antipathy of the Philippine President towards the European Union and the United States (especially when Barack Obama was still the President of the US). This was manifested in the “colorful language” used by President Duterte to insult either expressed in a humorous or agitated manner. This was particularly surprising in relation to the United States with whom the Philippines has had a historic strategic partnership. The apparent turn-about, however, is emphasized even more by what some have referred to as the “pivot to China.” This is in connection with the push closer to China after the years of bad relations that was a legacy of the Aquino Administration. These two developments, in turn, have become a key factor in the diminished significance of the existing regional architecture built around multilateral arrangements, principally economic in nature but also with an emphasis on security. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which in the last 30 years had grown to become one of the most important planks of the Philippines’ regional engagements, is losing salience in the course of intensifying competition between the US and China. The confluence of these three factors has been helped along by and in turn contributed to the orientation of the direction of the Duterte Administration’s foreign policy. Since 2016, the Administration has expressly characterized its approach as one that is consistent with the aspiration to pursue an “independent foreign policy.”

Article II, Section 7 of the Philippine Constitution of 1987 makes it clear that the Philippine state: “. . . shall pursue an independent foreign policy. In its relations with other states the paramount consideration shall be national sovereignty, territorial integrity, national interest, and the right to self-determination.”

This provision was largely a reaction to the belief (both locally and

internationally) that the historic and strategic relationship the Philippines has had with the US has been less than equal. During the Cold War, there were strong voices in the Philippines advocating a more “equidistant” policy towards the competing superpowers, i.e. the US and the Soviet Union. Despite these voices, the Philippines traditionally leaned towards the side of the US on geopolitical and geo-economic issues. Since the end of the Cold War, there had been some tweaking on the nature of this relationship (particularly when the Philippine Senate refused to ratify the renewal of a basing agreement that would have allowed the US military to continued access to Philippine military facilities). But the bilateral relations with the US remained the cornerstone of Philippine foreign policy. It has also remained the basis for the continuing self-doubt regarding the autonomy of the Philippines in its foreign policy-decisions. This is particularly the

case on matters of external security.

External security in the case of the Philippines since the decision not to renew the Military Bases Agreement in 1991 has centered around the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in the US, President George W. Bush declared the Philippines a major non-NATO ally which made it eligible for:

- Entry into cooperative research and development projects with the Department of Defense (DoD) on a shared-cost basis;
- Participation in certain counter-terrorism initiatives;
- Purchase of depleted uranium anti-tank rounds;
- Priority delivery of military surplus (ranging from rations to ships);
- Possession of War Reserve Stocks of DoD-owned equipment that are kept outside of American military bases;

- Loans of equipment and materials for cooperative research and development projects and evaluations;
- Permission to use American financing for the purchase or lease of certain defense equipment;
- Reciprocal training;
- Expedited export processing of space technology; and
- Permission for the country’s corporations to bid on certain DoD contracts for the repair and maintenance of military equipment outside the US.

After 1991, the country’s foreign policy gave increasing emphasis to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This reflected the emphasis given to development diplomacy in the aftermath of the Cold War. As a founding member of ASEAN, the country sought to be a full participant in the economic growth trend that characterized the grouping’s economic performance



Illustration by Luciano Sardea Ramirez

in the late 1980s and the 1990s. Since 2010, the Philippines has experienced an economic renaissance, which saw it outperform most economies in the region, with only China's economy growing at a rate that was faster. Yet, Philippine economic growth and economic activity had little to do with ASEAN. Instead, a key component of Philippine economic performance has been the service sector, particularly the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) operations, and the contribution made by Filipinos who have gone overseas to work. It has been acknowledged that Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) have been largely responsible for keeping the Philippine economy above water during the times when this was vulnerable to fluctuations in the global market. In 2017, the money remitted by OFWs amounted to more than USD28B, or close to 10% of the Philippine GDP. While the "export" of Philippine labor has had mixed consequences (good for the economy but problematic for social well-being), it has become a matter of personal choice for Filipinos to seek work outside the Philippines. According to the Philippine Statistical Authority (PSA), there were in 2017 alone, over 2.34 million Filipinos who left the country to work overseas. Of these, 2.27 million were under contract. An astounding 53.7% of these were women mostly between 25-44 years of age. Of this number, 85.5% went to Asian destinations, with a very

Since 2010, the Philippines has experienced an economic renaissance, which saw it outperform most economies in the region, with only China's economy growing at a rate that was faster.

large number going to the Middle East. Here, as the Bard said, lies the rub.

The problem of OFWs is their vulnerability to abuses both at a personal level (with their employers) and at a systemic level (with the host society in general). A growing awareness of abuses committed against Filipinos in the households or work places they are employed at have become crisis points in diplomatic relations between the Philippines and the host countries. At the same time, others have found themselves requiring assistance because of accusations of having committed a crime. In 2015, Senator Manny Pacquiao pushed

for an inventory of cases against Filipino overseas workers all over the world in order to have a sense of the scale of assistance required. On the part of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), this issue area has taken up much of their resources. The problem continues to fester because more and more Filipinos are going overseas

to find work, and Philippine Presidential Administrations have been too concerned about the economic benefits of remittances (not to speak of the safety valve that the OFW policy has created for potential political ramifications of lack of suitable employment for a growing labor force) to be aggressive in how they deal with host countries where these abuses have become normal.

These were the areas of status quo in the country's foreign policy that the emergence of President Rodrigo R. Duterte challenged. President Duterte campaigned on

the slogan of "Change is Coming!" In the close to three years that he has been in power, what has changed? Has anything changed?

With regards to the status quo issues presented above, little has really changed in the country's foreign policy even with the Duterte Administration taking over. Philippine-US security relations remain strong even with the hiccups over President Duterte's insults against the US in general, and President Barack Obama in particular. At the same time, the OFW issue continues to bedevil the country's leadership. In one area, however, Duterte's foreign policy has created quite an impression. And its starting point is a classic illustration of the adage that "all politics is local." His principal guiding post is the economic strategy of "Build, Build, Build." This refers to an ambitious plan to initiate a USD180 billion building spree spread across ten years. This plan includes the building of six airports, nine railways, three bus rapid transits, 32 roads and bridges, and four seaports, among a number of things. Financing this major infrastructure development program is going to be a huge undertaking. Sourcing funds locally (such as with tax reform under the passage of the Tax Reform Acceleration and Inclusion Act) is a key part of the strategy, but is definitely not enough. Official Development Assistance (ODA) is being sought from key donor partners. The Duterte foreign policy thrust should be seen in the context of this local development thrust.

A second consideration for the Duterte Administration is the need to redistribute wealth, de-centralize policy-making and de-concentrate wealth. Thus, a key part of the entire development strategy is political reform aimed at deepening the autonomy of local government units that had been granted under the Local Government Code of 1991 to the point of promoting a shift in the political structure of the



Discover Plenty at Marco Paulo

Whether on a leisure vacation with family, food trip with friends, or business meeting with colleagues, this place has it all.

Near the bustling city center of Cauayan, stands a triple-threat establishment operating since 2014 founded and owned by local Isabeleños, the Ong family. Marco Paulo Hotel and Restobar, named after one of the sons, operates as a hotel, restaurant, and event center.

Discover Delicious

Marco Paulo began as a shabu-shabu restaurant—the first of its kind in Isabela. Open daily from 10 A.M. to 10 P.M., the Marco Paulo Cafe & Restaurant serves Asian and international cuisine. They are well-known for their healthy shabu-shabu and regular shabu-shabu selections, an appetizing set sure to fill anyone up. Some of the Marco Paulo signature dishes feature baked salmon in marinara and mozzarella al forno, grilled ostrich steak in red wine reduction sauce, sizzling crocodile sisig, Hong Kong style roasted chicken, and crispy pata. Cap off your meal with cakes available on display, paired with any of the hot drinks, milkshakes, and smoothies on the menu. Satisfy incessant cravings as you discover delicious.

Discover Comfort

Marco Paulo Hotel is situated at the back of the lot housed in a pristine two-storey modern structure. Open since March 2017, the hotel has 13 cozy rooms complete with a small kitchenette, living room, work station, and outdoor area. Choose from the VIP Room, Premium Family, Superior King, Standard Quadruple, and Standard Triple accommodations equipped with Wi-Fi and a

fully-stocked mini-bar. Each room presents a bright and homey atmosphere that is sure to comfort anyone while away from home. Lay back and rest easy as you discover comfort.

Discover Elegance

Marco Paulo offers their Emily Banquet Hall for all social events. Named after the matriarch of the family, the spacious hall is capable of holding up to a maximum of 500 people and a minimum of 50 people. Available for weddings, birthdays, baptisms, and other special occasions, the place has an in-house stylist to decorate and beautify the interiors specific to a client's preferred theme. The event hall can also cater to business needs as a venue for conventions, seminars, and workshops. Celebrate without worries as you discover elegance.

With a fully-trained staff, Marco Paulo Hotel and Restobar is definitely a complete package in itself. There is a convenience store beside the lobby and a gas station nearby. It is also a short drive away from the Isabela State University, SM City Cauayan, Cauayan City Airport, and the main poblacion of Cauayan. Other nearby tourist attractions includes the D'Spot Rail Park, Our Lady of the Pillar Parish Church, and Hacienda de San Luis. Marco Paulo Hotel and Restobar is located along Governor F. N. Dy Boulevard, San Fermin, Cauayan City, Isabela. You may visit their page at <http://www.facebook.com/Marcopaulohotelandrestobar> or contact the hotel at (078) 652-5181.

Philippines from a unitary one to one that is federal in form. Again, the whole idea is based on the need to pursue a development strategy that is responsive to the needs on the ground. The “Build, Build, Build” program and the pursuit of political structural reform both play out in Duterte’s development program with a significant part of the former being identified as projects for areas with underdeveloped infrastructure and high incidence of poverty such as Mindanao. These main consideration shape Duterte’s foreign policy priorities.

Under the context of this development strategy, Duterte’s first foreign policy priority has been the courting of China. This was not an easy thing to do as the nadir of Philippine-China relations had been reached during the Aquino Administration. Yet, Duterte sought to assuage China of his good intentions and within the first six months of his Presidency was not only able to turn relations with China around, but has nearly turned the geopolitical situation in the region on its head.

Within a month after the accession of Duterte to the Presidency, the Permanent Court of Arbitration came out with its decision on a case brought before it by the Aquino Administration regarding the West Philippine Sea territorial dispute that was at the center of the poor relations between the Philippines and China in the years before Duterte came to power. The tribunal came out with its decision on July 12, 2016, and its fundamental points noted that:

There was no legal basis for China to claim historic rights to resources in excess of the rights provided by the Convention within the sea areas falling within the nine-dash line

High-tide features in the disputed area are legally “rocks” that do not generate an exclusive economic zone or continental shelf. As well, the Tribunal held that the Convention does not allow for a group of features to collectively

generate maritime zones.

Chinese activities preventing Filipino fishermen from approaching Scarborough Shoal to fish around its waters were deemed illegal. As well, the large-scale reclamation conducted by China had caused severe harm to the coral reef environment thus violating its commitment under the Convention to protect the marine environment and failed to fulfill diligence on the poaching of endangered and protected species harvested by Chinese fishermen.

It was also decided that China had violated its obligations to refrain from aggravating the dispute during the settlement process.

In a key decision that became the poster event for the “pivot to China,” the Duterte Administration decided to not to bring up the Arbitral Award in its pursuit of improving relations with China. President Duterte claimed that this did not mean that the Philippines was giving up on its claim but that this will be raised before his Administration ends at “an appropriate time.” In the meantime, the Philippines would seek to reap the economic benefits of improved relations with China.

A number of changes driven by improvements in relations with China have become evident in the last two years. Chinese official foreign direct investment to the Philippines has been on the uptick, as well the number of tourist entries from China. Official development assistance has not reached the levels at the beginning of the Aquino Administration, but has definitely been moving up at a modest rate. What has changed significantly is the trade imbalance with China, which has grown dramatically, more than doubling

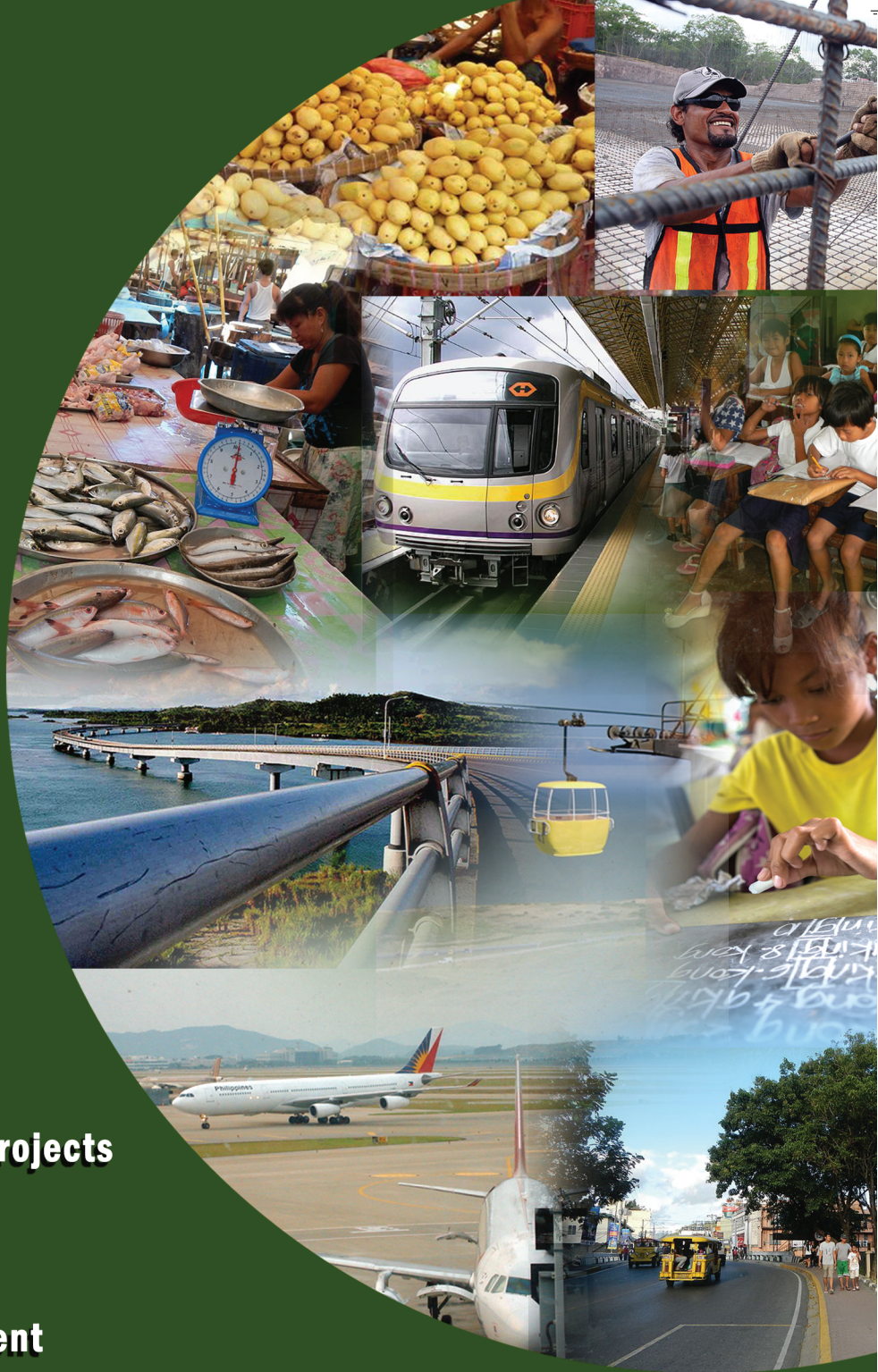
...Duterte sought to assuage China of his good intentions and within the first six months of his Presidency was not only able to turn relations with China around, but has nearly turned the geopolitical situation in the region on its head.

the trade deficit in 2015. This, however, would hardly seem to be an active promotion of “independence” in our foreign policy—replacing one form of dependence and courting another.

There is something to be said about Duterte’s pursuit of better relations with China as the crowning consideration of his foreign policy. For all the fawning that has been done, however, the numbers shown in the bilateral relations are quite underwhelming. In the case of trade, it would even seem that the Philippines is becoming a dumping ground for surplus Chinese products. Beyond questions of numbers, however, is the unresolved issue of the Arbitral Decision and other issues related to the South China Sea issue. The question that needs to be asked here is what are the costs to the country’s dignity of this pursuit of Chinese economic largesse? Beyond the Duterte Administration, what does the Philippines look forward to in its relations with China? More importantly, how does this reflect on the Philippines’ pursuit of an independent foreign policy? ■

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**APO Production Unit's passport to the future:
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**BY MAIELLE MONTAYRE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MANUEL GENEROSO**

Our passport is one of the best. It has garnered an award for best design. It is an e-Passport recognized by almost all countries with e-passport capabilities. It has never been compromised.



Philippine government offices process a huge amount of documents, such as certificates, permits, and licenses, every day. We see these all the time, but have we ever stopped to consider where these forms come from? Well, these are produced by three recognized government printers (RGP) that are mandated by Republic Act (R.A.) No. 9970 or the General Appropriations Act of 2010, and by subsequent general appropriation laws, to undertake the printing of accountable forms and sensitive high quality or high volume documents of the government. One of these RGPs is the APO Production Unit, Inc., or simply APO. It is a government-owned and controlled corporation (GOCC) as defined under R.A. No. 10149 or the GOCC Governance Act of 2011. With two branches located in Manila and Batangas, APO is tasked by the government to print accountable forms and high-security, high-volume documents.

THE INSTALLATION PROCEDURES

The history of APO dates all the way back to 1961. The Asian Productivity Organization (APO) was formulated in Tokyo, Japan by eight Asia and Pacific region governments, including the Philippines, to promote economic development. The APO Productivity Organization Information Unit established in 1967 was replaced by the Manila-based APO Production Unit on June 30, 1971. APO Production Unit then became the official printer of the APO member countries.



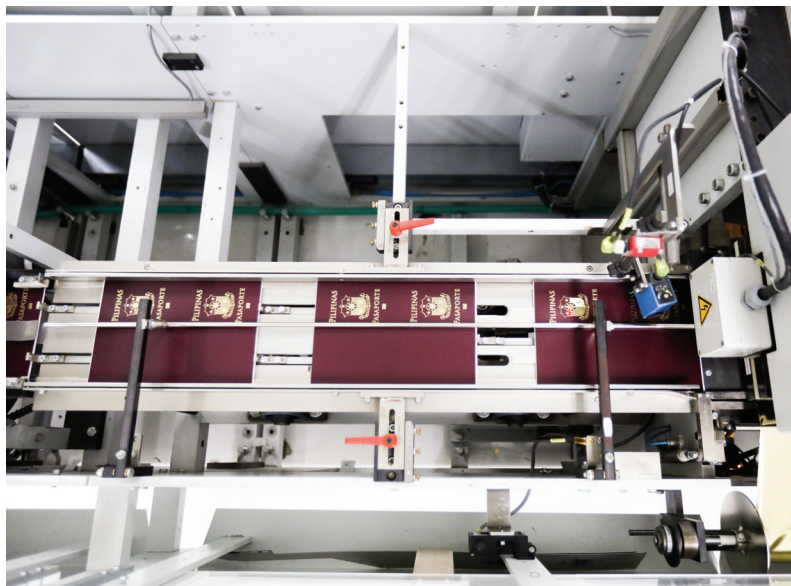
In 1974, however, then President Ferdinand Marcos issued Presidential Letter of Instruction (LOI) 197, declaring APO Production Unit as a “self-sustaining operation” under the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), thereby allowing it to solicit and accept printing jobs from government agencies and GOCCs. APO Production Unit was incorporated as a non-stock, non-profit corporation with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Over the years, APO had been placed under many different agencies. In 1996, APO’s management was transferred to the private sector under the Asset Privatization Trust. It was subsequently transferred to the Office of the Press Secretary (OPS) in 2000, to the Philippine Information Agency (PIA) in 2004, back to the OPS in 2006, and volleyed back to the PIA in 2010. Finally, Executive Order No. 4 was issued on July 30, 2010, reverting the control and supervision of APO to the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO), previously known as the OPS. Today, APO remains as one of the three RGP’s alongside the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) and the National Printing Office (NPO).

PERIOD OF TROUBLESHOOTING

As a GOCC, the Board of Trustees are appointed by the President of the Philippines. Their position is coterminous with the appointing authority. Michael J. Dalumpines currently sits as the Chairman and CEO of APO, appointed in 2016 by President Rodrigo Duterte. The present Board of Trustees consists of Philip S. Dionisio, who is also the president; Alvin R. Reyes, the general manager (GM); and Joecel F. Obenza, the executive vice-president (EVP). Dalumpines recalls, “I remember, when I was appointed, the President told me, ‘Ayusin mo, may mga problema diyan.’ (Fix the existing problems there.) It was a marching order and I said ‘yes, I’ll do it.’”

Indeed, saying there was a problem was an understatement. APO found itself on the verge of closing down in 2010 when it experienced a shortage in operating funds. As a self-sustaining GOCC, APO receives no budget allocation from the government. It relies solely on job orders obtained from government agencies and local government units (LGUs). At the time, the cash flow was low, the payables were high, labor



costs were immense, and the equipment was outdated.

The APO Board under the Aquino administration managed to address some pressing issues to counter the near-bankrupt state of APO. They were able to save APO's finances through short-term bank loans. Slowly, APO was able to pay off long-standing debts. Gradually, they regained the trust and confidence of many government agencies, particularly the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Social Security System (SSS), and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

COMMENCING INITIALIZATION

After having successfully overcome their struggles and refueled with renewed vigor, APO was able to obtain more printings jobs, especially those with high-security and high-volume requirements. Pursuant to R.A. No. 10351 or the Sin Tax Law passed in December 2012, the BIR assumed control and supervision of the production and issuance of excise stamps on tobacco products, previously done by tobacco companies. With APO tapped as the sole and recognized printer of tax stamps, this ensured the absence of forgeries thereby assuring the BIR of efficient collection of sin taxes.

In 2014, the DFA sought to improve the production and personalization of the passports, after experiencing delays in passport delivery. APO stepped up to the task of producing the new e-Passport with upgraded and increased security features. By July 2014, APO expanded its operations to a three-hectare security printing facility in LiMa Technology Center (LTC) located between Lipa City and Malvar (LiMa), Batangas. The Quezon City plant continued to print accountable forms.

From the start, Dalumpines sought to improve the operations of APO as it strives to be the best. Their existing printing job on the e-Passport could still be perfected. Through the committed efforts and coordination between APO and the DFA, the delivery and printing of

the Philippine passports was improved. APO can now print as many as 25,000 passports a day, exceeding the expectations of the DFA. "We are also preparing; in the eventuality the demand increases, we can handle it owing to the capabilities of our machines and equipment. It is not a problem for us. If we have to bring in more machines, we can do so," Dalumpines states.

On top of the improvements and existing projects, APO sought out more partnerships finding ways to serve the government even more. Dalumpines observes, "When I assumed office, we already had existing customers but it was not enough. We live on our own as a self-sustaining company. If we cannot sell our products—our main source of income—we will have to close shop." Fortunately, the newly appointed Chairman-CEO was experienced in business management, having previously worked in recruitment and product distribution. Using his expertise in the field of sales, Dalumpines doubled APO's efforts in the sales and marketing departments. "APO Production Unit is a government printer whose end goal is to sell our products. It remains a sales organization, catering to government agencies," he says.

APO GM Alvin R. Reyes says, "We were fortunate enough because when we came in, APO already had the tax stamps and the passports. On our part, we are looking to the future instead, to leave a legacy so we are able to give some service to the country."





Upon his appointment in 2016, Dalumpines did not immediately have board members and officers to support his efforts. “When I assumed office, most of the board members had already resigned,” he recounts, referring to the coterminous status of APO’s board with the appointing authority. “I was just by myself. I was acting as the chairman, the CEO, the sales manager, everything. The present Board was only appointed last year, with the fifth member just recently. Now, there are five of us but when I was appointed it was just me, a one-man show.” The present Board of Trustees consists of Philip S. Dionisio, who is also the president; Alvin R. Reyes, the GM; and Joece F. Obenza, the executive vice-president.

LAUNCHING THE PROGRAM

APO continues to improve its service to the government and the public by implementing tighter security measures in their operations both in the Quezon City and LiMa plants.

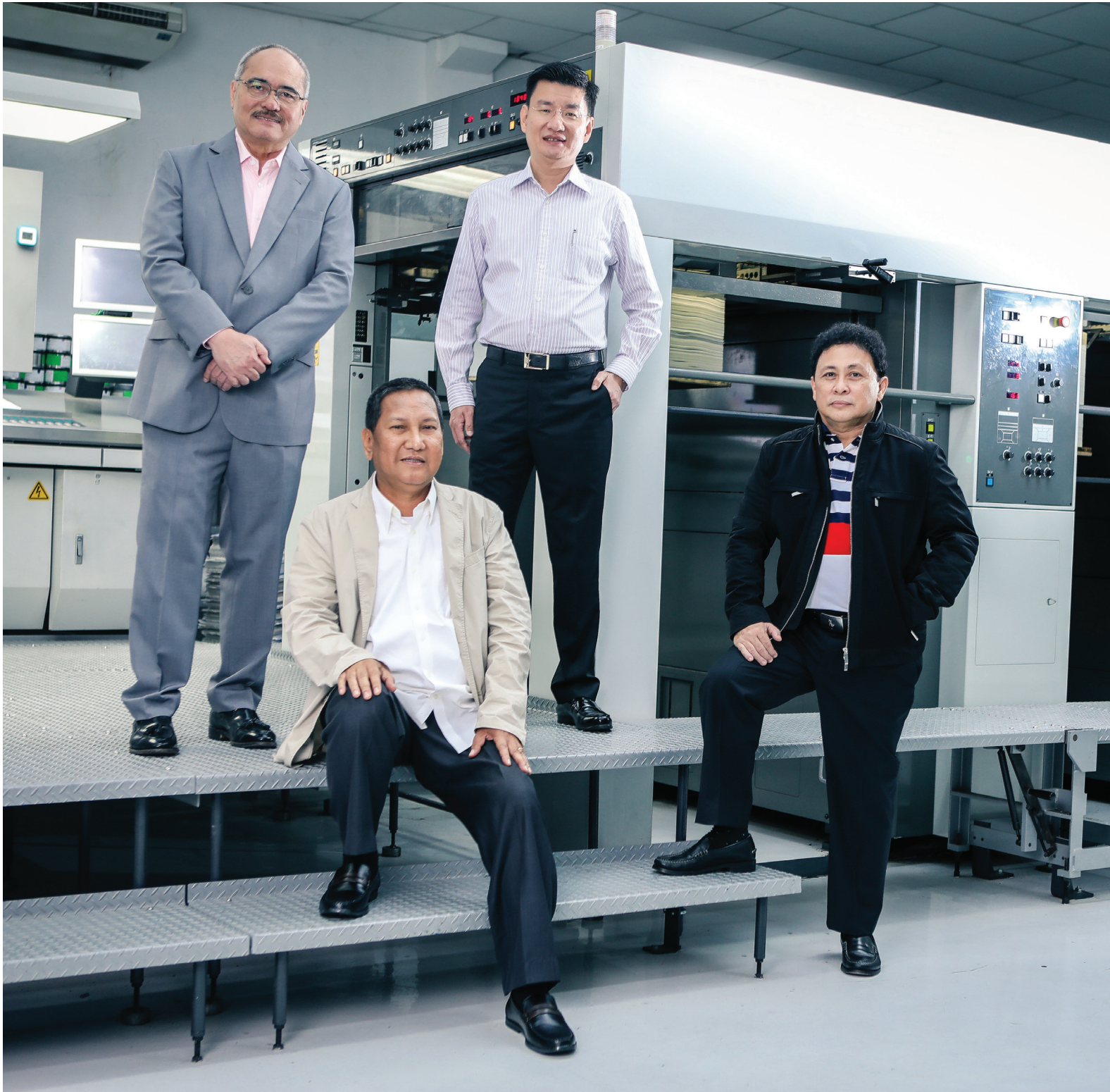
“Last year was the first time we breached the P4 billion-mark in terms of sales, a first in APO’s entire history,” Dalumpines reports. “To go from a state of near bankruptcy in 2010 to reaching a record-breaking P4 billion in sales by 2017 is no simple feat. We really worked hard for that, which we achieved through our sales,” he adds. APO continues to receive more orders from government agencies and LGUs, further expanding its clientele. Utilizing sales and marketing techniques, APO writes letters to prospective clients and submits proposals depending on the client’s requirements.

On top of the record-breaking sales in 2017, APO was able to remit P10 million to the national treasury through the Department of Finance on August 2018. Its total remittances so far for the current year has reached P22 million. “If you don’t have the profit, it means you have a very low grade. If you do not have any contributions to the government, why are you still there? That is why APO almost closed shop because we were unable to remit anything to the government,” Dalumpines says. The role of GOCCs is to obtain revenue for the government, therefore fifty percent of APO’s net income each year is remitted to the national treasury “You think of things to keep your company afloat and your head above water. It is not the problem of the government to help you,” the APO Chairman-CEO adds. “You are given the mandate, the resources; all the government agencies are your prospective clients, but the government does not expect you to run to them, asking for a favor. You really have to stand on your own.”

This challenge APO is able to overcome because each RGP has their area of specialization. “APO’s competitive edge among RGPs is really in the high-security, high-volume printing,” Dalumpines says. APO President, Dionisio, further explains that the BSP handles all monetary printing. The NPO, meanwhile, covers the non-securitized printing such as election ballots. “Government agencies can choose from among the three RGPs, depending on their printing requirements. As it stands, the BSP has its own existing contracts, so do the NPO and APO,” says Executive VP Obenza. Among the three RGPs, it is only APO that specializes in securitized documents, ensuring the security and safety of data. “We also have capabilities in IT because printing nowadays is not only limited to the physical identification. It all started with e-Passport through data capturing, which means taking your biometrics. It is now part and parcel of printing today,” Dionisio explains. “We take your biometrics such facial, iris, and fingerprints. Then, we take your credentials and merge that so it becomes your identity. That becomes the passport, which can also become the national ID. So, you are your credential,” GM Reyes further explains. Not only are the documents safe and secure, they are also personalized to each individual.

“Our passport is one of the best. It has garnered an award for best design. It is an e-Passport recognized by almost all countries with e-passport capabilities,” Reyes says. “It has never been compromised.” APO has been printing the Philippine passport for the past four years. The visual design is striking and eye-catching, featuring highlights of our Philippine history and culture. Compliant with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards, APO designs the high-tech security features in coordination with the DFA, particularly the overt and covert designs to ensure security. This is to guard against forgeries and tampering as it is revenue owed to the government. Cases of forgery are immediately discovered because of the security features. If the visual or covert features are absent, officials instantly know that it is a fake. “The tax stamps are worth Php35 and APO prints five





billion of them. That is how much we are able to help the national government,” Reyes continues. “APO is able to earn simply from the printing cost, which is low despite the high security features. We do not charge the public so much, just enough for the production cost.”

APO also claims that the Philippine e-Passport is one of the least expensive in the world. Other countries, like Hong Kong and Germany, have higher production costs and pricier passports. “But the technology is the same as ours. Our technology is ICAO-compliant, based on international standards. Most passports all over the world have the same security features but ours is known to be cheaper,” APO President Dionisio says. “It is a public service so APO cannot charge higher premiums. It is not a commercial product where you can place higher mark-ups to earn more,” GM Reyes adds.

Now, APO is focusing on its bid for the national ID. After President Duterte signed the Philippine System Identification Act into law, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) was designated as the lead agency mandated to develop a single official identification card for all citizens and foreign residents. “The national ID will be bigger than the e-Passport. We are banking on our status as an RGP,” GM Reyes says. “We are confident in our track record, showing APO as the best RGP to handle highly sensitive information. APO is therefore in the best position to undertake the national ID.”

ALL SYSTEMS GO

APO envisions being an integral and essential component in the infrastructure providing world-class printing solutions to the national government and its agencies. “We are still heading in that direction, doing plenty of legwork to expand our business,” Dalumpines says. APO has opened a branch in Davao to handle all the government agencies in Mindanao with the hope of bringing in more sales from the region. APO also further plans to open another branch in the Visayas. “Rather than wait for them to send their requirements, we have decided to go to them, to talk to the LGUs personally,” the CEO explains. “That is the thrust now, to go on a nationwide attack. It

remains a sales and marketing strategy. Otherwise, you will be stagnant. As a sales organization, we are here to bring in revenue for the government so we are doing all we can to maximize and optimize our capabilities,” he adds.

APO also envisions providing printing services to foreign governments and international organizations. “We want to offer our services to third world countries unable to invest in their own printing facilities and currently have their printing done by first world countries at higher cost,” APO President, Dionisio, says. They already have prospective clients from among the small countries in the Pacific, which are interested in having APO print their countries’ national ID. “Our interest is to close the deal. Even if it is a small country, it is still an international market so we can start on a global scale,” APO Chairman, Dalumpines, pronounces.

With a vision in sight and more projects in mind, APO endures. The GOCC has steadily progressed from nearly closing down nearly a decade ago to surpassing sales targets and remitting profits to the national government today, learning from the past and capitalizing on its strengths. “In our own little way, we can show the President that APO has improved. We have made positive steps that make us proud and will make the President proud. Even for a small corporation, we are contributing more than enough to the national treasury, thereby fulfilling our purpose of providing revenue for the government,” Chairman and CEO Dalumpines states.

When asked about the scope of public service APO provides, Dalumpines simply invites everyone to look at their Philippine e-Passport. “It is of a national scope. It helps our fellow countrymen in their travels abroad because our passport is one of the best in the world, award-winning and ICAO-recognized. This helps our travelers – the Filipino people, especially the OFWS – transit to other countries with ease,” he declares. “They are holding the one document that goes beyond our borders, telling the world the Philippines is slowly becoming a progressive nation capable of doing many great things.”



CHANGING LANES

The MMDA is shifting gears to tackle traffic

BY JOYCE REYES-AGUILA
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MANUEL GENEROSO

Metro Manila traffic is a riddle that's tough to solve. Just ask anyone who has spent a few hours mired in gridlock. Heavy vehicular volume and chaotic pedestrian activity merely scratch the surface of the problem both undoubtedly complex and deep.

In the middle of metropolitan thoroughfares are the men and women of the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA). They enforce the rules, act as scarecrows to would-be violators, and decisively deal with motorists who disregard the law. It's a headache like no other but Jose Arturo "Jojo" Garcia Jr. took on the challenge. Just as MMDA Chairman Danilo Lim did not turn President Duterte down when he was offered the agency's post, Garcia could not say no to Lim.

"He has a very good stature and is very well respected," the MMDA general manager says of Lim. "He was incarcerated for seven years just to fight corruption. How can you say no when a person with that kind of dignity tells you he needs your help?" Lim is a retired

brigadier general of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) who faced rebellion and attempted coup d'état charges during the Gloria Macapagal Arroyo presidency. He and other comrades staged a standoff to oust the former president and call attention to corrupt activities in the AFP.

Garcia left the private sector and was appointed assistant general manager for planning before President Rodrigo Duterte assigned him as general manager of the MMDA on February 2017. His marching orders: Do public service and take care of the people.

LOOKING FOR ROUTES

Traffic is the MMDA's most pressing concern in its mandate that includes development planning, solid waste disposal, flood control, health and sanitation, and public safety. "It's a daily concern of the public," the San Beda College alumnus declares. "It did not happen overnight. It did not start last month, last week, or last year. It started decades ago because of a lack of proper planning. So, the solution will also not happen overnight."

According to the general manager, Chairman Lim is implementing short-, mid-, and long-term solutions to address the metro's road challenges. And to be able to find a solution, the problem-solver has to know what lies behind the surface of our road woes.

What causes these difficulties? Garcia identifies two key things: the volume of vehicles and the limited infrastructure in place. "Every year, the number of vehicles increases, but the roads we have do not," he explains.

According to Chairman Lim said that the metro's infrastructure is behind by 30 years. To illustrate, there were 450,000 brand new vehicles in the country last year. Sixty percent of these traverse the streets of Metro Manila. This year, the MMDA expects 500,000 new automobiles adding to the volume. Garcia predicts that around 300,000 of these will travel in the city.

Adding to our misery are the misutilization of roads. Garcia avers that illegal parking and illegal vendors obstruct pedestrian walkways. If they occupy these, people will walk on roads, thereby taking another lane away from traffic.

"These (vendors) will dare to sell in these areas if they are paying off someone to enable them to," he adds in the vernacular. "Buses will not have illegal terminals, or load or unload passengers in prohibited areas if they are not giving money to someone. These are activities we really need to stop." Garcia reports that

"The bottom line is, no matter how good the policy of the government is, if the citizens do not want to follow, we will have a hard time. The government can't do this alone. We really need the cooperation of the people."

under Chairman Lim, around 1,000 enforcers charged with alleged corruption have either been fired, placed on floating status, resigned, or have on their own volition been absent without leave.

Is there a way out of our current traffic situation? Anyone who has seen Garcia on television or read about him in the media will have a good premise of what he envisions. He has also probably explained it a million times.

"Let me explain so I can convince you," he begins. "First is the infrastructure which the government is addressing right now through the Build, Build, Build infrastructure program," he says. "But projects like the Skyway connector, C-6, and other new roads will take years to be completed. We have to do something in the meantime."

Another is improving mass transportation so our *kababayans* (fellow citizens) will use these instead of driving their own vehicles. "But again, it will take years to do," he



continues. “That’s why we have short-term solutions such as carpooling—and I don’t mean getting passengers and charging them for a ride. Carpooling is when four co-workers or classmates schedule to ride together in one car every day of the week, for example.

“There are drastic measures like the odd-even scheme where 50 percent of vehicles will be removed from the streets. Two-day coding will remove 40 percent of vehicles. The problem is that even with short-term solutions like these, after many years, the problems increase.” Many motorists purchase another car to comply with the odd-even scheme. It means having more automobiles on the road—the total opposite of what the scheme aims to accomplish.

Garcia is aware that carpooling will merely transfer traffic volume to alternate routes. “That’s why these alternate routes are meant to be used by drivers who do not have anyone to carpool with,” he maintains. “We are not saying the entirety of Metro Manila should do it or that it should be done 24/7. We’ve just identified three hours in the morning and three hours in the evening to address the volume of vehicles. We need to schedule when they can traverse our roads.”

Ridding the metro’s main roads of provincial buses is also targeted—a move seen by some as “anti-commuter.” Garcia insisted it’s otherwise. Once these buses pass by the outskirts of the metro, travel time will be faster because the yellow-lane occupancy will be lighter.

“When commuters get off the provincial buses, they transfer to a city bus. It’s not their

final destination. They transfer vehicles when they reach the terminals. We will remove the 46 terminals that become choke points. Because for every bus, 40 to 50 passengers get off and wait for their next ride. The front of the terminal becomes a terminal for jeepneys, taxis, and buses. We will remove these so traffic can flow better,” he explains. Daily, Metro Manila’s daytime population increases from around 15 million to 20 million because residents of nearby provinces like Rizal, Laguna, Bulacan, and Cavite travel here for work.

“If we fix this, we can lift coding for the city buses because they provide public service. But now we can’t lift it because nobody is complying with the expanded High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) traffic scheme lane policy,” he adds, pertaining to the traffic mitigating measure proposed by the MMDA that requires vehicles to have at least two passengers to traverse EDSA during certain hours. As of this writing, the dry run of the scheme is ongoing while dialogues between the agency and different branches of the government are done.

LANE CHANGE

The agency is also trying to change the mindset of citizens to increase compliance. Residents who park on streets in front of their homes are being told to find private slots. “They have benefited from the public area already, it’s time for the government utilize it. It’s not our responsibility to look for a garage for your cars. It’s the car owners’. We need all roads that can be alternative routes for motorists,” he said.

Garcia’s office applies the same principles to vendors who have used public roads or sidewalks for income without having to pay. “It’s time the roads are used for motorists because these were made for them in the first place. The vendors tell us they have families to support. We are not against vendors. For us, we are just correcting the way roads are used. Let’s say there are 100 vendors, 100 families will be affected. But think of how many people will benefit if we clear the roads—hundreds of thousands pass there.

“The bottom line is, no matter how good the policy of the government is, if the citizens do not want to follow, we will have a hard time. The government



can't do this alone. We really need the cooperation of the people. The number one (requirement) is really discipline. That's why Chairman Lim and I say that you cannot complain if you do not follow the rules. You have no right to complain because you yourself violate the law," he stresses.

Internally, the MMDA leadership is also implementing "drastic" changes in the organization. Garcia reports that the agency is trying to change its image through numerous efforts, including encouraging good grooming among its enforcers. "How can you respect an enforcer when he looks like a holdupper? They should look proper and wear ironed uniforms. If we want to get the attention or respect of the motorists, the enforcers implementing the law should be respectable. We cannot impose respect; we should earn that."

It's an initiative that the agency is probably thankful for when some of their enforcers are seen in viral videos on social media. The work of its Task Force Special Operations led by commander Edison "Bong" Nebrija to clear sidewalks and tow illegally parked vehicles is frequently viewed online.

"The perception of the MMDA has changed since we've assumed office. At least, there's respect in some way. If before we became viral because of *kotong* (extortion), now we go viral because we're doing good," he says. "When a post becomes viral, it can reach 16 to 18 million views. That makes our information drive through social media easier. But, of course, the negative side of it is if you just commit one mistake, and you get bashed for it. But if you do good, people show their appreciation. Of course, there are still some who have a radical view and do not see any good in whatever we do."

Garcia's office is also looking into some tow truck operators suspected of extortion, too. He says nuances like these put the efforts of enforcers to waste. "Early in the day, they are involved in confrontations, are bashed, get punched, have guns pointed at them. And then one (corrupt) tow truck operator ruins our image? I always say, if (our enforcers are) doing good, we are behind them. We will defend our personnel. But if they do wrong, I'm sorry, they will be put in their right place."

He credits Lim's leadership for the



organizational changes, sharing that people like Nebrija who have been with the agency even before the current chairman assumed office reflect the transformations that have taken place. Under Lim's leadership, the general manager is also proud of the good relations the MMDA has with the mayors of Metro Manila and government agencies such as the Department of Public Works and Highways and the Department of Transportation.

"My work is easier because of my chairman," he says. "People see him as someone with no agenda. We are just doing this for the common good. Every policy has a negative and positive impact on the citizens. It's impossible to implement a policy that everyone can be happy with. You just have to think of who will benefit more."

Weekends are not off days for the general manager, who drives himself around to see what is happening on the ground. "When they ask me if I have (background in) traffic studies, I say no. I did not study traffic or what. To make solutions for traffic, you should experience the roads.

"It's common sense. You don't need to be a genius to see why there's heavy traffic. If you know the problem, you can find a solution. The problem is not knowing what the problem is."

Garcia stresses there is hope for Filipinos when it comes to enforcing the laws to help mitigate traffic-related problems. Proof is when they are able to abide by laws when they are in Subic or travel to countries like Singapore. "We just need enforcement," he closes. "The MMDA cannot do this alone. We need the help of the LGUs (local government units). And we really need the participation of the public." ■



Call to LGUs: SAVE THE OCEANS

BY CYNTHIA U. SANTIAGO

“Even amid our abundant marine resources, our fishermen are among the poorest of the poor because of three major problems: declining fish catch, degraded marine habitats, and encroachment of commercial fishers engaged in bottom trawling.”

– Atty. Gloria Estenzo Ramos
Oceana Philippines vice president

‘**A**lam mo naman sa gobyerno ... alam na natin ... kung ano ... minsan effective, minsan hindi ...”
Such broken, unfinished sentences, yet pregnant with undertones, about government action comes from fisherman Caloy (not his real name) expressed in a video recently presented by Oceana, an international ocean conservation and advocacy organization.

Atty. Gloria “Golly” Estenzo Ramos, vice president of Oceana Philippines and a member of the Executive Committee of Oceana International, says Oceana is in our country because the Philippines is “the center of the center” of marine biodiversity in the world.

Atty. Ramos points out that our marine resources provide food for 50 million Filipinos and long-term livelihood to 1.8 million fisherfolk.

What’s more, as the top 11th exporter of wild-caught fish, the Philippines helps feed the world.

Marine biodiversity refers to the richness and abundance in the world’s seas and oceans. The world is 70% water, which provides most of what we need to survive—food, livelihood, health resources, and even recreation areas. If we destroy our waters, we practically destroy our world.

Wild-caught fish are those caught by fishermen from their natural habitat, as in the sea, such as swordfish, king mackerel, tilefish, shark, and tuna. Farm-raised fish—*tilapia*, catfish or *hito*, salmon—are, yes, raised by farmers.

Debate is ongoing about which is better—wild-caught or farm-raised. Those against farm-raised say the fish are fed with antibiotics or pesticides—which could make you sick. While those against wild-caught, worry over environmental issues such as commercial fishing—especially through bottom trawling—which is destroying the seas, many areas of which, including those around our territory, are already overfished.

Oceana Philippines campaigns officer Candeze Mongaya presents as an example, the plight of

sardines. She says in 2015, the Philippines had a net 344,730,201 kilograms of sardines, worth P7.43 billion, which makes sardines a major economic driver.

Mongaya says that there are telltale signs of overfishing of sardines: the catch is dwindling, and those caught are smaller than their parent-sardines we enjoyed many years ago. The culprits, Mongaya adds, are climate change and ocean temperatures, plus those using killer fishing gears.

Which brings us to bottom trawling. It refers to fishing using a cone-shaped net to catch bottom-dwelling creatures and invertebrates. In the Philippines, trawlers operate on soft, sandy, and muddy seabeds. Their target: the highly-prized shrimps and prawns we so want to have on our table.

ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Alas, Atty. Ramos laments, even amid our abundant marine

Photos by Ed L. Santiago



Atty. Gloria 'Golly' Estenzo Ramos, Oceana Philippines vice president



Candeze Mongaya, Oceana Philippines campaigns officer



As the top 11th exporter of wild-caught fish, the Philippines helps feed the world.



Woman sells fish in Moalboal.

At the Bulong Pulungan media forum (seated from left): Mila Alora, moderator Deedee Siytangco, Jullie Yap Daza, Atty. Gloria Ramos, and Rina David. (Standing, from left): Oceana PR consultant Rosary Ysmael, Bob Zozobrado, Cynthia Santiago, Oceana social media strategist Desiree Ong, Candeze Mongaya, and Noel Reyes.



resources, our fishermen are among the poorest of the poor because of three major problems: declining fish catch, degraded marine habitats, and encroachment of commercial fishers engaged in bottom trawling, using gear like a vacuum cleaner to collect seafood from our municipal waters.

Atty. Ramos says Oceana mounts campaigns combining policy, advocacy, science, law, media, and public pressure to save the oceans from pollution and irresponsible industrial fishing. She added that the success of the campaigns depends largely on the cooperation of local government units. Without their will to implement the laws, saving the seas will be nothing but an impossible dream.

SAVING THE PHILIPPINE RISE

Atty. Ramos says that Oceana is supporting the implementation of a presidential proclamation, recently signed by President Rodrigo Duterte, formally declaring parts of the Philippine Rise undersea feature as a marine resource reserve.

The President announced the signing of the decree in a media briefing aboard BRP Davao Del Sur off the coast of Aurora in the northeastern part

of the Philippines, which is the nearest port to Benham Bank.

Benham Bank used to be known as Kalipungawan until American surveyors discovered the plateau and named it after Admiral Andrew Benham, a US Navy officer.

Benham Bank is the shallowest region of the Philippine Rise, a 24.4 million hectare undersea region located east of Luzon.

Government scientists who went to the area in 2016 said they saw terraces of corals, “as far as the eye could see.” This means we still have such a vast and pristine coral reef ecosystem within the Philippine territory, which we still need to protect, shares Marianne Pan Saniano a marine scientist for Oceana Philippines.

The area includes a 13.4-million hectare outer section that was validated by the United Nations’ Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (UNCLOS) as part of the Philippine territory in 2012.

The Duterte proclamation declares Benham Bank as part of the Philippine Rise protected area. Benham Bank, which is around 17,000 hectares, has been declared as a no-take zone and will be closed to any human activity except for scientific research.

Oceana quotes President Duterte as saying that the presidential proclamation includes the requirement for continuous assessment of coral reef and fish species, which he says is “vital for the management of the Philippine Rise and its resources.”

President Duterte also committed to enabling Filipino scientists to fulfill their mandates in conducting scientific research in the Philippine Rise by signing into law the Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System (ENIPAS) Act of 2018 or Republic Act 11038, which adopts strong amendatory measures to the 24-year-old National Integrated Protected Area Systems (NIPAS) Act. The RA 11038 strengthens protection and adds more than 100 legislated protected areas in the Philippines, including the Philippine Rise Marine Resource Reserve.

Atty. Ramos says, “We laud the timely passage of the ENIPAS Act, as it will enhance the conservation efforts undertaken for our unique but vastly threatened biodiversity and ecosystems including our marine habitats.”

THE TAÑON STRAIT MODEL

Aside from Benham Bank, the ENIPAS Act includes the Tañon Strait which was established as a Protected Seascape by President Fidel Ramos

under Proclamation 1234 of 1998.

Tañon Strait, known for whale and dolphin watching, is 161 kilometers long and connects the Visayan Sea and the Bohol Sea, along the cities of San Carlos, Negros Occidental, Bais, Negros Oriental, and Toledo, Cebu.

Oceana’s partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies for its Vibrant Oceans Initiatives program aims to restore fish populations in some countries including the Philippines.

In the video, Dr. Mundita Lim, Biodiversity Management Bureau director of the Department and Natural Resources, pointed out that 42 municipalities and towns are dependent on Tañon Strait for most of their livelihood and food supply. “Tañon is our everything,” she added.

A fisherman attests that as early as 1990, the catch at Tañon had begun dwindling mainly because of illegal fishing such as dynamite fishing and commercial vessel encroachment. That’s because there was limited law enforcement in place to protect the Tañon Seascape.

Antha Williams, head of Bloomberg’s Environmental Programs, says: “When we looked at the landscape, we saw a really dire problem in overfishing and so Bloomberg Philanthropies launched the Vibrant Oceans Initiatives to solve the problem.”

Bloomberg has partnered with Rare Philippines, a non-governmental organization addressing environmental problems by directly working with local communities, and Oceana which works on national policy reforms.

Atty. Ramos says: “Oceana came in 2014, and we were able to immediately enter into agreements with local government units, which had long been partners of rare. Our victory for us really was the resolution requiring vessel monitoring for all commercial fishing vessels in

Tañon Strait. The fisherfolk are the ones to tell you now that the fish are coming back.”

The local officials are also happy. Says Bindoy Mayor Valente Yap: “When we started the program, we were having fish catch of only one to two kilos a day. And after two years with the program, our fishermen are enjoying four to five kilos a day. It’s more income for the family. They can send their children to colleges and we can also reduce malnutrition.”

Manjuyod Mayor Felix Sy, points out: “What we have done in Tañon Strait—this is a model to be replicated in other areas. To have an alliance.” That’s good news for Caloy and his fellow fishermen.

Indeed, we’ve heard the Chinese proverb many times already: “Give a poor man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him to fish and you give him an occupation that will feed him for a lifetime.” Yes, for a lifetime. As long as we have this alliance of all concerned, especially the local governments, to save the oceans. ■

“There are telltale signs of overfishing of sardines—and the culprits are climate and ocean temperatures plus the guys using killer fishing gears.”





**WHO YOU ARE
IS HOW
YOU LEAD**

Most of his colleagues would take their chauffeur-driven cars every day to go to work. Most of them think nothing of taking the courtesy lane for VIPs at the airport upon arriving from an overseas trip.

But not Muntinlupa Rep. Rozzano Rufino “Ruffy” Biazon. The three-term legislator takes the MRT at peak hours. He knows how it feels to have a sea of commuters pushing him forward, while he’s standing right next to the door.

He takes the P2P bus, rides the jeepney, and walks if he wants to. That’s because he wants to check out the state of public transportation and experience everything a regular commuter does.

“That’s what we’re supposed to do as a policymaker,” the 49-year-old congressman explains. “It enables us to double check what government officials say they’re doing. I understand that sometimes, they paint a positive picture of the reality. But they can’t fool us.”

Again, unlike some of his colleagues, Biazon politely declines to head straight to the airport courtesy lane and lines up just like us ordinary citizens. As usual, he wants to know if returning passengers encounter problems on their way to the carousel, immigration, and other areas at the airport.

ON THE JOB

This on-the-ground style is something he learned from his father, former senator Rodolfo Biazon. The four-star general shunned special treatment and preferred to mingle with his men when he was still in active military service.

His congressman-son proves he’s a chip off the old block by talking to his constituents, even if he has to turn down an offer from the men to join them for a few rounds of beer.

Biazon apologizes and says he’s on duty. It has come to a point where the men have stopped offering him drinks because they know their representative will say no. They also know

Muntinlupa Rep. Ruffy Biazon shares how good and sound leadership begins with understanding the everyday plight of the typical Filipino

BY MARIDOL RANO-A-BISMARCK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RENJIE TOLENTINO



Biazon will gently urge them to take care of their liver and save the money for their children's school needs instead.

This ease with the common folk is one of the reasons why Biazon won the Congressional seat for the Lone District of Muntinlupa by a landslide of 60,000 votes.

It's also how he convinced informal settlers living by the railway to relocate to a place in the city's New Bilibid Prison years back. Biazon didn't force them to leave their homes in Muntinlupa for a faraway province where they can hardly find a job, where their children have to travel miles to get to school, and where basic utilities like power and water are absent. Instead, he personally went to almost 10 *barangays* and held two town hall style meetings a day on weekends. Biazon talked to heads of 100 families and discussed the issues with them. Biazon's dialogues were held, not only while he was campaigning for government office, but even after he won in the elections. He asked then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (GMA) to donate a portion of the almost 500-hectare New Bilibid Prison property for the informal settlers. That's how Biazon secured the 50 hectares where he relocated Muntinlupa's informal settlers.

His eight years of experience in total—as his father's chief of staff and as part of former Senator Sergio Osmena's office—has taught Biazon a lot. One of those lessons was how to handle rejections from Local Government Units (LGUs).

“Sadly, LGUs turn down informal settlers because they're (an) added burden on their social services,” notes Biazon. “More people mean additional problems.” That is why, in the end, many resettled families leave the relocation site in the province and return to the city.



Biazon's solution to informal settlers is in-city relocation and a usufruct agreement, which gives them the right to use property for 50 years, enough time to help them raise their families and seek livelihood.



SOCIAL MISSION

Biazon's solution is in-city relocation and a usufruct agreement with the informal settlers instead. The agreement gives informal settlers the right to use the property for 50 years, or nearly a lifetime.

Biazon thinks that's enough time for them to earn a living and send their children to school. Once done with school, the children can start working and find a permanent place for the family.

"I talked to one of the residents in their unit," recalls Biazon. "His barbershop services around 20 residents a day at P40 per haircut. His children are now in school."

A more heartwarming story is that of a teacher who asked for a selfie with the congressman. "Sir, I was a scholar in your basic education program. I'm about to finish my doctorate."

These and other stories inspire Biazon to do more for his constituents. He finds out what they need by checking his social media accounts @ruffybiazon and @officialruffybiazon. He himself posts messages ranging from asking for the reference number of a

package that has remained unclaimed in the post office, to his views on national issues.

Down the road, the highly-regarded congressman wants to continue the programs of Muntinlupa mayor Jaime Fresnedi when he reaches his last term of office in 2022. Unlike other congressmen and mayors who are at odds with each other, Biazon and Fresnedi support each other. They plan annual programs together so government funds won't go to waste on overlapping projects. Biazon allots funds on a national level, while Fresnedi takes care of local expenses.

It is important for the programs that Biazon and Fresnedi had started to remain in force for the next generation. So Biazon is mulling over the possibility of "shifting from legislative to executive level." Read: He'll run for city mayor.

Meanwhile, this outstanding congressman continues to enrich the treasure trove of knowledge he has gained through the years by serving the people the best way he knows how—by being as hands-on as he can be. ■

RADICAL CHANGE

With her impressive track record, Berna Romulo-Puyat is bringing back order and instilling a renewed sense of trust and confidence as Chief of the Department of Tourism

BY JOYCE REYES-AGUILA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROMEO PERALTA, JR.

Even from the outside, the past few months must have appeared as an overwhelming stretch for Tourism Secretary Bernadette “Berna” Romulo-Puyat.

Her role in public service took a sudden turn with her appointment to President Rodrigo Duterte’s Cabinet early this year. The circumstances were unusual. The Department of Tourism (DoT) was embroiled in corruption allegations, owing to deals entered into by its outgoing administration. Romulo-Puyat, then an Agriculture Undersecretary, was tasked to lead an agency in dire need of both fixing and direction.

“While former DoT Secretaries had a honeymoon period, I had none,” the Tourism Chief admits. “The issues involving the (department) were indeed intimidating for an incoming Secretary.” Romulo-Puyat’s appointment was simultaneously framed by headlines on the controversial P60-million tourism advertisement allocation signed off by her predecessor’s office. Romulo-Puyat’s untarnished reputation was the saving grace the administration needed for a troubled department.

CLEAN SLATE

Citizens familiar with Romulo-Puyat prior to her current post instantly understood why she is a perfect fit for the embattled agency. As an Agriculture Undersecretary, she focused on agribusiness and the promotion of the country’s food produce and culinary talent worldwide. Her previous role entailed going

around the Philippines to help implement the 10-point agenda of Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary, Manny Piñol, and the Duterte administration.

“Being in the DA for close to 12 years, I was able to travel around the country and see how beautiful our country is,” she says. “Each province has its own unique tourist spots, food, and leisure activities that tourists can enjoy. (Knowing all these) convinced me to accept the President’s offer to become Tourism Secretary.” On social media, where her Instagram account @bernsrp is followed by more than 15,000 users, the Secretary’s feed features a mix of Filipino food offerings, traditions, scenic spots, and inspiring stories. As an Undersecretary, she traveled to learn about the Punnuk end of rice harvest ritual of the indigenous people of Ifugao, promoted Philippine produce in food fairs, and recognized the country’s food entrepreneurs. Her duties included finding ways to ease farmers’ burdens of high cost of inputs and lack of access to credit, increasing inter-agency coordination to protect our natural resources, and a relentless campaign on the enforcement of agricultural and fisheries law.

“When the President talked to me about my appointment,” she recalls, “he mentioned that I have credentials and a government service track record, which qualify me for the post. He also noted that I have not been involved in any corruption issue ever since I started serving the government.”

Romulo-Puyat belongs to a family of noted public servants. Her father is former



several cabinet posts in previous administrations—including Executive Secretary and Foreign Affairs Secretary. Her brother is former Congressman Roman Romulo, and her grandfather is the late Filipino diplomat, statesman, soldier, journalist, and author Carlos P. Romulo.

IT'S MORE FUN

At the DoT, the Secretary, who has a degree in Economics from the University of the Philippines (UP)-Diliman, says she and her team are learning the ropes. “I have been orienting myself through various meetings with our officials and attached agencies, our partner agencies, as well as our stakeholders in the private sector, on the issues surrounding the tourism industry. This is my way of learning firsthand the things that we should focus on and ways on how to address them.

“In addition to this, I am also meeting with ambassadors or representatives of various agencies on possible areas of cooperation with other countries, and on how we can increase tourist arrivals from various markets,” continues Romula-Puyat, a former Macroeconomics professor at UP. “I have also been attending various speaking engagements and networking events to discuss the



DoT's policy direction and work plan for the coming years."

According to her, the policy direction of her department generally involves a review of its mandate and the National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) to keep the focus on their role as mandated by Republic Act 9593 or the Tourism Act of 2009. This is being complemented by efforts to "continue working with partner government agencies, such as the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and the Department of Transportation (DOTr) in improving policies on access, connectivity, and security, as well as on enhancing programs on tourism infrastructure.

"We will consistently be holding consultations with our key stakeholders and make such consultations a venue for exchange of ideas, suggestions, and best practices. I am proud to note that, last June, the DoT hosted the meeting between Cabinet Secretaries and officials representing different government agencies (e.g. Department of Public Works and Highways, Bureau of Customs, etc.) wherein we discussed the most pressing issues affecting the tourism industry, as well as possible areas of collaboration in order to address these issues." Recently, the Secretary has shared the inter-agency cooperation focused on the recent closure and planned reopening of Boracay island to see to it that efforts are sustained to protect its natural resources.

Romulo-Puyat is also utilizing her experience in the Agriculture department to implement the DoT's plans. Under the National Tourism Development Plan, the DoT has been promoting various tourism products such as, but not limited to, nature-based tourism (nature recreation and adventure, cultural tourism, sun and beach tourism, health, wellness, and retirement tourism, cruise and nautical tourism, leisure and entertainment tourism, diving and marine sports tourism, education tourism, and MICE [meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibition]).

"Similar to what I practiced in the DA, I have already started my regional trips to learn more about how our regional offices operate, and to learn more about the tourism products being offered in our various regions and provinces," she explains. "While I was an Agriculture Undersecretary, I was in charge of the department's market-linkage initiatives and in promoting various agriculture and fishery products from our regions. While my plans and

activities for those concerns have been abruptly stopped due to my appointment to the DoT, I feel that I can still continue what I have started since I will not only be focusing on local, food but will be promoting the whole country as well."

Romulo-Puyat implemented this approach last June at the 9th edition of the Philippine Harvest Trade Fair that was held in cooperation with retail distributor Store Specialists, Inc. The event, conceptualized during her time in the DA, shifted its goal from promoting food to showcasing the best culinary destinations in the country. Among the provinces promoted were Cebu, Albay, La Union, Guimaras, Negros Occidental, Quezon, Davao, and Dumaguete.

"This is our way of promoting the Philippines through food and culinary tourism," she explains. "Through Philippine Harvest, you can go around and taste the food from all over the country in just one place. This also gives our farmers, fisherfolk, and agriculture practitioners the opportunity to have an interactive dialogue with the consumers during the exhibition... Farms have become tourist spots as more and more people are becoming interested in healthy living, our local cuisine, and the whole value chain.

"I hope that our tourists, as well as partners in the industry, will continue supporting and developing the said tourist products in order to make tourism a more vibrant industry in the country. It is worthy to note that under my leadership, the overarching theme for all our programs and initiatives will be creating a culture of sustainable tourism, so as to balance development with environmental protection. I believe that a sector cannot significantly contribute to the economy if it is not sustainable, thus I encourage my colleagues in the industry, as well as our tourists, to advocate this campaign in order to contribute to countryside development and create a dependable source of income for the Filipinos through tourism."

MULTIPLE HATS

Aside from business as usual, Romulo-Puyat is participating in the ongoing investigation of the corruption charges at her department, and is implementing internal changes to facilitate it. One of her initial decisions was to request Undersecretaries and Assistant Secretaries to submit courtesy resignations to give her a free hand in choosing who can work within the

agency. The new officials holding these posts under her office “were chosen based on their credentials and track record,” she says, and adds that the “team will be able to deliver on our targets given their expertise and experience gained from their respective fields.”

The Tourism Chief also requested the Commission on Audit (COA) to look into already approved projects—all of which she has temporarily suspended. “After the completion of COA’s review, our focus now would be the concerned offices’ and agencies’ compliance to COA recommendations in order to prevent them from happening again,” she maintains.

Other “internal house-cleaning” reforms, she shares, include coordinating with COA and the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) for advice on systems and controls. “COA is helping us strengthen our audit system to ensure that no government money is wasted,” she declares. “We hope to transform the DoT into a champion of good governance and integrity.” The Cabinet Secretary’s decision is aligned with the President’s marching order during her appointment: “No corruption.”

“With the support of the President...and through close coordination with COA and the OSG, we have been getting sound advice and are in the process of strengthening our internal system.”

None of Romulo-Puyat’s political decisions will lead to her running for elective office, by the way. “I have no plans,” she asserts. “I think other people are more suited and qualified for an elected position. I think I can help the country more at my current position.”

She is really all business, and has her eyes set on being able to do her job. “I focus on my tasks and make sure that they are satisfactorily delivered. I see to it that all my programs, projects, and activities are in line with the organization’s mandate, and that they follow existing rules and regulations—most especially those pertaining to accounting and auditing. I also ensure that all my decisions are guided by industry and legal experts in order to ensure that our initiatives are legally sound and effective.

“As a leader, I value efficiency, honesty, professionalism, resourcefulness, and cooperation. I also give value to consultations—specifically with our stakeholders—so that the Department remains relevant to the demands of the industry.” ■

“COA is helping us strengthen our audit system to ensure that no government money is wasted... We hope to transform the DoT into a champion of good governance and integrity.”



THE HEART OF MENTORING

Eight transformative lessons from Senator Loren Legarda

BY MARY JANE SALOMON



It was not easy working for and with Senator Loren Legarda, public servant par excellence, but I am fortunate that I did. To some, she was like Meryl Streep in the movie, *The Devil Wears Prada*, and yes, there are similarities, but she has a heart of gold. She is not just a woman of substance, but works with purpose, too. Her love of country, dedication to public service and fidelity to family are the things that will always bind us until the end.

Despite the sleepless nights spent working under her office, I look back on those days with great satisfaction and fulfillment. I'm thankful for the opportunity of working for and with her, and grateful for the privilege of learning directly from her.

While others quit because of one reason or another, I am glad that I never gave up on her. I am proud that I did not refuse her. I left to work overseas to pursue new opportunities for my career advancement, with her permission, but I never really left. My spirit stayed with her.

Senator Loren Legarda, or SLL as we call her, molded me to follow her example, challenged me to rise above everything and inspired me to become what I am capable of becoming. For me, that is mentoring at its finest.

A leader extraordinaire, Sen. Legarda's brand of public service is principled, positive, instructive, and sharp—a rarity nowadays.

Here I share some of the enduring values and lessons that I've learned from her.



1 Have a “can do” attitude. As a public servant who broke numerous glass ceilings, she stood as a guide and example for other women in government. She urged us to be proactive and outspoken. She told us: “Do not tell me that it cannot be done, it can be done, of course!” No excuses.

2 Nothing beats hard work. Hard work is necessary for every endeavor. She puts premium on hard work and advised us to not let our emotions get the best of us or get in the way of our work.

3 Work hard as an individual, work well as a team. Being serious, resourceful, and dedicated are the qualities she required from every one of her staff. We had to work according to process and be guided by our goals and objectives. Feedback is a must.

4 Coordinate. Collaborate. Cooperate. Multi-tasking is an ordinary occurrence in her office. Everyone must work, side-by-side, to ensure the quick and efficient delivery of services and execution of orders. Everything must be done without delay.

5 Dress appropriately. Be professional at all times, in words, in deeds, and in appearance. Respect the occasion by dressing appropriately. It is a sign of a cultured person.

6 Be loyal. Be loyal at all times. For loyalty must not be decided by opportunity, but by fidelity to both the cause and the person.





7 Don’t be naive. Study. Observe. Listen. Learn. Age should not be used as an excuse for ignorance.

8 Respect Deadlines. Time is gold and the three-day rule to reply is very important. (You must complete the task within three days.) It is mandatory to carry a small notebook, so that nothing is overlooked, and you won’t miss commitments and deadlines.

Mary Jane Salomon worked as the Legislative Staff Officer of Sen. Loren Legarda.

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FEATURES

CELEBRITY IN CHIEF

Quezon City Mayor Herbert Bautista talks about bringing star power to government service

BY LAKAMBINI BAUTISTA

In a celebrity-crazed country like the Philippines, show business is said to be the most convenient jump-off point to politics. You are given credence simply for being popular. While this is partly true for Herbert Constantine “Bistek” Maclang Bautista, better known as Bistek, being an *artista* also served as a challenge for him to prove that he’s more than the *komikero* and underdog roles he has portrayed on television and in the movies.

Some of us probably remember him as Napoleon Guidote in the comedy show, “Kaluskos Musmos,” in the late ’70s; as Reneboy, brother to Janice’s character in “Flordeluna;” as Bistek in the BBC 2 TV series “2 + 2;” as one of the stars of the 1980s hit *Bagets*; as Teng-Teng, the junk collector who transforms into muscled superhero Captain Barbell; and as Jill, the gay sibling of Sharon Cuneta in the movie *Jack and Jill*. These roles and more, he has essayed during his career as an actor, spanning almost 40 years.

The transition from show business to politics almost comes naturally, says the Quezon City mayor, who is serving his final term. He says it’s probably because he was raised by his parents, Butch and Baby Bautista, in a very Pinoy culture—helping the disadvantaged. In his growing up years, he was also surrounded

by people who are known for being charitable—Dolphy, Erap, and FPJ—among his dad’s *barkada*. “What I learned from them is that: your left hand doesn’t need to know what your right hand is doing,” he quips in the vernacular. In other words, you don’t need to broadcast the good things you are doing to others.

“Papa, Erap, and FPJ were together in Lo’ Waist Gang, when they were 19 years old. They were really friends. So when we were born—me, Gracia, Jinggoy, and JV—we would see each other in family gatherings. Then eventually, I costarred with Sharon, who is the niece if (Senator) Tito Sotto and now the wife of (Senator) Kiko (Pangilinan). Sharon’s father, Pablo Cuneta, was Pasay City mayor,” Mayor Herbert ruminates on the showbiz-politics connection.

He admits to feel offended when people say, “*ahhh taga-showbiz lang ’yan*” (he’s just from showbiz). To people who looked down on people from the entertainment industry, he’d like to say: “You don’t know the backbone of the entertainment industry!”

Mayor Herbert argues that show business has in more ways than one prepared and molded him to become a good public servant. One of the virtues he gleaned from show business is inclusivity—encouraging teamwork to achieve a common goal. “I was trained in an industry where everyone listens to the director, where there is a



production manager who takes care of the location, an assistant director who takes care of the shot list, a scriptwriter who takes care of the script, and so on. I was trained to be inclusive,” he says.

He looks back to the time he first assumed mayorship of Quezon City in 2010. “First day of the executive committee meeting, I asked only two points: One is, if you were mayor, what do you want to do? Submit to me in the next two weeks the programs in the backburner that need to be implemented. Second is, crisis management. We don’t want an incident like Payatas or Ozone to happen. So having said that, my line was: *kung merong sasabog sa mukha natin* in the next six months and one year, *paano n’yo iso-solve ’yan? Ano ang mga dapat nating gawin?*” From Day 1, his leadership was big on teamwork.

THE MAKING OF A MAYOR

Like his showbiz career, which took him four decades of hard work and perseverance to build and sustain, Mayor Herbert’s political dreams weren’t realized overnight. Like others, he worked his way up the political ladder—from being chairman of the Kabataang Barangay (1984 to 1992), to being councilor (1992 to 1995), vice-mayor (1995 to 1998, 2001 to 2010), before winning the mayorship for three consecutive terms (2010 to 2019).

During and in between these years in government service, Mayor Herbert also served in various capacities—as Commissioner-at-Large of the National Youth Commission, director and PRO of QC-YMCA, president of the Rotary Club of Kamuning, prime minister of the QC Jaycees Senate, Inc., member of the Board of Governors for Philippine National Red



Cross, and Brigadier General of the AFP Reserve Force, a promotion confirmed by the Commission of Appointments (CA) two months before he celebrated his 50th birthday on May 12.

Mayor Herbert is not the type who would brag about his educational attainment, but he declares wanting to equip himself with the necessary tools for public service. Thus, after graduating with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in Philosophy and Letters from San Beda College in 1992, he took up his Master of Arts (MA) in Public Administration and Governance at the National College of Public Administration and Governance (NCPAG), University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman (1993), and Masters in National Security Administration (MNSA) at the National Defense College of the Philippines, Department of National Defense (1999-2000). Mayor Herbert furthered his formal education by taking up a

Doctor in Philosophy degree (PhD) in Political Science (International Studies and Development) also in UP Diliman (2007).

Prior to assuming his post as city chief, Mayor Herbert studied the needed tools for urban governance. In Vietnam, he learned about Eco²Cities—stressing on the importance of balancing economic progress and environmental concerns in nation building. At that time, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo had just signed the Disaster Reduction and Management Act, so “I reviewed the law, made my research, and came up with the formula that would become the foundation of my administration: disaster reduction and management + environmental protection = urban development. The objective is to make Quezon City a resilient city,” he explains.

You can say he wanted to prove his detractors wrong—but more importantly, he wanted to change people’s perception of the entertainment industry. “I’d like to believe that what I did for myself is the other way of looking at the people from the entertainment industry,” he remarks. “Showbiz is not all glitz and glamour. Our investment here is blood, sweat, and tears.”

Showing versatility and empathy in fulfilling his duties is part and parcel of his job as city mayor, a work ethic he has imbibed in his

colorful years as an actor. “When you’re a mayor, there are times when you have to play the role of an engineer, a doctor, an embalmer, a traffic enforcer, etc.” he says. While he had to learn many of these along the way, Mayor Herbert is proud of what has become of Quezon City, since the time he took his oath as mayor.

LEADING THE RACE

Mayor Herbert smilingly points to us the cabinet in his office bedecked with plaques and trophies, when *LEAGUE* asked if he is happy already with what he has achieved so far for Quezon City.

Truth is, one needs to simply go around Quezon City to see the living testaments of urban development: the rise of several commercial establishments (Araneta Commercial Center in Cubao, Eastwood City in Libis, UP-Ayala Land Technohub in Diliman, and the city’s very own Central Business District, which is currently in progress); the relocation of informal settlers to safer places (as of 2017, 22 Bistekvilles have already been built in various points in the city); the major infrastructure projects in transportation that are underway (MRT Line 7, an additional Segment 8.2 to NLEX-C5, and C6, which will run from Skyway/FTI, Taguig to Batasan Complex, QC.)



One of Mayor Herbert’s flagship projects was a socialized housing project to address the issue of informal settlers.





“I am 50 years old. I have served the people of Quezon City for 33 years. The three years that I won’t be in public service may be a short time, but I believe that that would be the happiest period of my life, because that would be the time that I will be spending time with my children.”

The city’s Disaster Risk Reduction and Management efforts have been recognized several times at the Gawad KALASAG (Kalamidad at Sariling Galing and Kaligtasan), awarded by the Office of Civil Defense, an agency of the Department of National Defense.

Since 2011, the city government has already implemented the Community Health Information Tracking System (CHITS), that allows QC health center facilities to access patient information online.

Through an innovation aptly called BOSS (Business One Stop Shop) launched in August 2010, business registration is faster and more convenient for entrepreneurs. In fact, in 2017, QC was the city with the most registered businesses in the country—72,538 in all.

And of course, one of the most prestigious affirmation is being deemed the Most Competitive City for three consecutive years (2016, 2017, and 2018) by the National Competitive Council, based on the Cities and Municipalities Competitive Index’s “three pillars of competitiveness:” infrastructure, government efficiency, and economic dynamism. (More about the developments in Quezon City in the next page.)

NEXT STEP

After his term ends in 2019, Mayor Herbert confesses to *LEAGUE* that he doesn’t intend to run for any government post in the upcoming elections. He says he has served Quezon City for more than half his life; it’s about time that he devotes his time to being a father to his four children. He confesses to being an absentee father, and now that his older children are in need of some guidance in their careers, it’s about time that he pitches in for some much-needed advice and guidance.

He admits to having several options at present—run for Congress, for the Senate, for vice-mayor, not run at all, or have himself appointed to a government position. We requested him to keep us posted for updates, in case he changes his mind, but he seems to be dead-set on his decision.

Then he told us, “I am 50 years old. I have served the people of Quezon City for 33 years. The three years that I won’t be in public service may be a short time, but I believe that that would be the happiest period of my life, because that would be the time that I will be spending time with my children.”

To the people of Quezon City, he only has words of gratitude for their trust and support. “I’m really very thankful to the people of Quezon City because I would not have been able to accomplish these without their trust in me.” He ends by saying that he hopes his successor would be compassionate, circumspect, and true. ■



INNOVATION CHAMPION

BY JOYCE REYES-AGUILA

An inside look at Quezon City's formula for continued progress

If you hover miles over Metro Manila, it will easily be the most visible city. Stretching over a vast 16,000 hectares, Quezon City occupies a fourth of the country's National Capital Region. Its borders connect it to at least seven other cities in the metro, and is considered as a hub of economic activity and a preferred location for living, play, and leisure.

The geographical advantages are among the many strengths of what has been recognized as the most competitive city in the country by the 6th Regional Competitiveness Summit and Awards for three years in a row. The body also named Quezon City, also known as QC, as the most competitive in terms of infrastructure, and ranked it second highest in competitiveness in areas of government efficiency, resiliency, and economic dynamism.

"In Quezon City, commitment is commitment," Mayor Herbert Constantine "Bistek" Maclang Bautista said in his State of the City address last year. "That is why we have progressed as far as we have." The city head has been in public service since 1986 and

rose up the political ranks from a youth leader, councilor, vice mayor, to mayor since 2010. For more than 32 years, Bautista has focused his career on Quezon City, along with various nationwide responsibilities. In the city's coffee table book, "Governance: Innovations and Reforms: Sharing the Breakthroughs in Urban Challenges," the mayor admits feeling like he practically grew up with the development of city.

Innovation is key to QC's continued progress. Its government, fully aware of the ever-changing times, crafted a strategy to identify possible challenges and areas of opportunities. A grand development plan "encompasses the entire range of socioeconomic concerns, including business, infrastructure, environment, peace and order, and governance," and focuses on "concerns that center on the people: health, education, social services, livelihood, and housing."

It is not an easy task for a local government looking after such a populous territory. Quezon City's "state of continuous growth and development" increases the demand for better, more efficient services for different sectors. Business groups, families, students, employees, and its most indigent residents bring various sets of expectations and needs. These have driven Mayor Bautista to prioritize ease of business,

infrastructure, education, and the improvement of social services, among others.

Over 72,000 registered business establishments have benefited from operational reforms instituted to improve business registration and applications for construction and occupancy permits. The city introduced a one-stop shop in January 2018 to provide a centralized location for all transactions, assessments, and evaluations which entrepreneurs and business groups are required to complete. The local government believes these changes enabled it to top the Cities and Municipalities Competitive Index in the sub-indicators of economic dynamism and infrastructure. Through a "file and pay" approach, it reduced the interaction of corporations and single proprietors to only two.

According to Bautista's office, the mayor's goals with the improved processes also included cutting down on red tape and avoiding inconveniences to the public. In its 2016-2017 annual report, Quezon City reported that business taxes accounted for 51 percent of the city's income and amounted to more than P9.5 billion in 2017.

On its goal to enhance the quality of education, the city continues to provide support



through financial assistance and the construction of school buildings. Bautista considers education as a key area to empower citizens to prepare them for the changes brought about by the regional integration of the Association of South East Asia Nations (ASEAN). QC's enrollment participation is at 95 percent at the elementary level and almost 86 percent for secondary education. The city government supports more than 2,900 students from the most indigent families attending college and graduate school. It also provides funds for residents who belong to the informal sector to enable them to access technical vocational education and skills training.

The city estimates that 45 new public school buildings or 772 new classrooms were built during Bautista's administration. The refurbishment of the Quezon City Public Library (QCPL) included innovations in the areas of radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology to store information in books, an integrated library system, and the adaption of a new cataloguing standard. The QCPL has branches in all its six districts—instrumental to the implementation of reading centers in Quezon City's depressed areas.

The focus on helping the poorest of the poor is due to Mayor Bautista's partiality to citizens who are disadvantaged, disempowered, indigent, and are most at risk, according to the

city government's coffee table book "Hope Becomes Reality." It explains that this is the reason why "among the government programs directed at people's welfare, the ones that are given most attention are those for the vulnerable and less endowed." Realities that all cities in Metro Manila share, such as having homeless individuals, out-of-school youth, and residents who have no means of supporting themselves financially have increased Bautista's will to earnestly address this marginalized sector.

A socialized housing program is offered in QC to allow families to acquire their own homes in self-managing communities. It is considered by the city's current leadership as a priority project that mitigates disaster risk, minimizes "urban blight towards improved environment management," and upgrades communities and their quality of life. As of last, the Quezon City Resettlement Program had relocated 22,982 families, all of whom are targeted to benefit from the city's transformation programs that aim to reduce their vulnerability to disaster, provide them with clean and healthy living conditions, and access to other social and livelihood services.

Under Bautista, more than half a million healthcare facilities were completed as of 2017. The Quezon City General Hospital added a two-story outpatient department and continues to serve as a training center for medical personnel.





As a result of a 2012 city ordinance, a facility dedicated to provide medical, psychological, police, and legal assistance to victims and survivors of gender-based abuse and violence continues to serve women, children, and members of the LGBT (lesbians, gay, bisexuals, and transgenders). Called the One-Stop Protection Center, it offers counseling, medical care, and investigative services that are done in a gender-responsive and child-friendly manner. Facilities for drug rehabilitation, rescued street children, and the city’s health department office at the City Hall have either undergone or are scheduled to undergo physical improvements as well.

The city has adopted a Community Health Information Tracking System to improve the access to health information by any health facility to ensure appropriate medical treatment. And in keeping with the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations, innovations to care for mothers and children are now available to the residents of the city.

Aside from being gender-safe, Quezon City also aims to be drug-free. The Anti-Drug Abuse Advisory Council of the city, headed by Vice Mayor Joy Belmonte, is implementing a community-based approach in treating and rehabilitating surrendering drug users. Belmonte reports in the city’s 2016-2017 annual report that around 500 former illegal drug dependents were employed as laborers in the construction of the Metro Rail Transit System Line 7 (MRT-7) project

Mayor Herbert talks about the ongoing and upcoming infrastructure projects in Quezon City.

Under Bautista, more than half a million healthcare facilities were completed as of 2017. The Quezon City General Hospital added a two-story outpatient department and continues to serve as a training center for medical personnel.



that is expected to run until 2020.

For the rest of its residents, the Bautista administration is pushing for inclusive growth through the generation of more jobs and livelihood opportunities. Entrepreneurship and microfinance programs are offered via the Small Business Development and Promotion Office that is in charge of “linking local government services, national programs, private sector funding with the city’s micro and small, backyard producers.” As of 2017, the city says that a total amount of P5.96 billion in loans have been granted to more than 95,000 entrepreneurs, of which around 93,547 are women. Aside from this, it has employment programs, localized, targeted training, and assistance to migrants in place.

In these areas and in the rest of its responsibilities, Quezon City operates in a sustainable fashion that will continue to benefit

its citizens over the long term. Through a “green and blue” campaign, it seeks to reduce its carbon footprint by lessening greenhouse gas emissions through improvement of waste disposal and management, utilizing alternative sources of energy, anti-pollution programs, and mandating green building standards in all structures. Bautista established and chairs the Environmental Policy Management Council that is tasked to recommend policies and projects related to ecology, waste management, and other urban environment advocacies.

Amid its growing population, rising infrastructure, and increased activity, Quezon City is strengthening its environment management systems and capacity to mitigate risks and adverse impacts on its communities. Modernization and innovation will ensure its competitiveness while focusing on the environment ascertains its sustainability.

Mayor Herbert Bautista’s public service career has always given emphasis on making a difference in people’s lives. His government continues to receive affirmation through local and international awards and recognitions for its implemented programs and initiatives. With every empowered resident – whether through a new house, job, a cleaner school, a feeling of belongingness, and a sense of security – Quezon City thrives. And it is doing so with visionary leadership and a local government that stands up for every member of society it sees as equally important as the rest. ■

Mayor Herbert Bautista’s public service career has always given emphasis on making a difference in people’s lives. His government continues to receive affirmation through local and international awards and recognitions for its implemented programs and initiatives.



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DREAMS OF A NATIONAL CAPITAL

What has become of Quezon City, a planned capital city for the country?

BY JOHN LEE CANDELARIA

It would be hard to believe that Manila in the 1930s was already considered congested, but it was. The economy was booming and Manila represented the dream of Filipinos all over the country—there was a job and a better life waiting for them here. Everyone wanted a piece of Manila.

But what made Manila an economic capital, with centers of trade, proximity to big ports and access to the sea, also made it susceptible to potential attacks. At that time, international politics was considered a powder keg: memories of the first World War were still fresh, yet talks of a bigger war were looming on the horizon, and all it would take was a small spark to ignite an explosion.

All these considerations were not lost on Manuel Quezon, president of the Philippine Commonwealth, a transition government to prepare for the independence to be awarded by the Americans in a few years. What the country needed was a national capital that could best reflect the aspirations of a newly independent nation, a future capital that could replace Manila.

These dreams of a national capital gave birth to Quezon City.

A CAPITAL CITY FOR THE WORKING MAN

Quezon proceeded to found the People's Homesite Corporation, using the land from the Tuason family, some 1,572 hectares which is now known as Diliman. This is where Quezon started building his city, with the commissioning of a blueprint from William E. Parsons, who died in 1939 and left the work to his partner, Harry T. Frost, an adviser of the Commonwealth on architecture. Frost sought the help of A.D. Williams, former director for Public Works, and Juan Arellano, the country's top architect. Louis Croft, a landscape architect, was also asked to collaborate in the masterplan.

This piece of land in Diliman was supposed to be the Barrio Obrero or the Worker's Village, a housing project for government employees. Later on, additional land was purchased to serve as the center of defense of the new capital. This site was called Camp Murphy, which is today divided into Camp Crame and Camp Aguinaldo.

With this in place, a bill was introduced to create Balintawak City. But with the different sectors' deference to the man behind it all, the law was passed as Commonwealth Act No. 502, or the charter of Quezon City.

The new city was expanded to include nearby towns, totaling to around 7,300 hectares. The



people were enthusiastic to be part of the planned new city, in hopes that they could partake in the development which was to happen on a grand scale.

A GREAT METROPOLITAN DISTRICT

Frost outlined in his masterplan of Quezon City as it stands with other planned cities in the world, a phenomenon that was not something new, even in the Philippines. The Americans had also planned Baguio City as an escape for the American colonial government in the Philippines when the heat of summer in Manila was too much to bear.

He referred to Quezon City as “an integral part of a great metropolitan district,” akin to what we refer today as the National Capital Region. Quezon City was initially conceived as “practically the only remaining residence properties near Manila that are susceptible of development on a large scale.”

While everything looked rosy for Quezon City, the air was thick with murmurs of war, and by December 1941, the Japanese were on the shores of Manila.

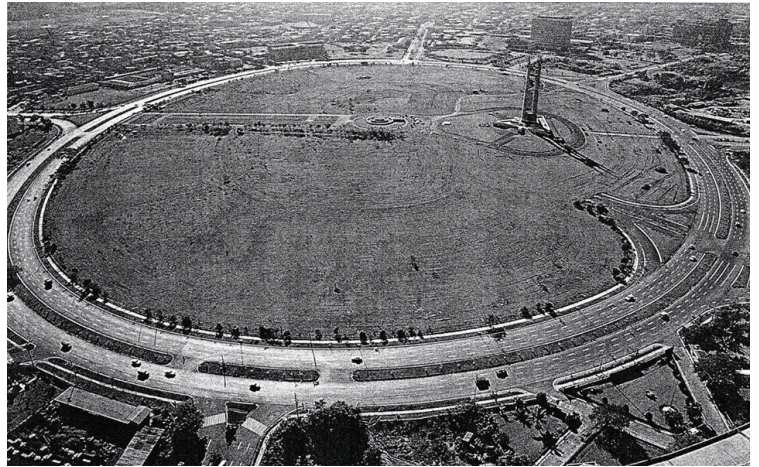
REVIVING THE PLANS AFTER THE WAR

It was President Elpidio Quirino who had to take the helm of realizing the dreams of the Capital City after the sudden death of Manuel Roxas, the first president of the republic after the war. Quirino signed Republic Act No. 333 in 1949, establishing the permanent seat of national government in Quezon City from Manila. It also created the Capital City Planning Commission headed by Arellano, who was called back in to work on a new masterplan.

The heart of the 1949 Arellano plan is the Constitution Hill (Batasan Hills today), envisioned to be the site of the three main branches of the government: the House of Congress will hold both houses of the legislative, the Palace of the Chief Executive will be the residence of the President, and the Supreme Court. In the original plan by Frost, this national government center was located in what is now the Quezon Memorial Circle.

Only the Batasan Complex was realized in the Constitution Hill, while the Palace and the Supreme Court remained in Manila.

The new masterplan also had a quadrangle at the heart of the city, bounded by the East, West, South (Timog today), and North avenues. Principal streets radiated from the avenues to the city's borders. This quadrangle was supposed to be a “central park” in a city envisioned as full of greens and gardens. It would house a botanical and zoological garden, a golf course, and a stadium.



The Exposition grounds were also envisioned near the quadrangle; in 1941, this was projected to be the site of the 1946 World's Fair, an affair to celebrate the country's independence. This site is now SM North.

This park was never realized; while the avenues remain today, much of the quadrangle was apportioned for other purposes.

A CITY FOR FILIPINOS

Street and avenues were to be named after historical events, Filipino heroes, and other Filipino names. Many of these remain today, such as Katipunan Avenue, Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao avenues, among others.

The original goal of creating a city to provide housing was realized through the projects numbered one to five, with a six, seven, and eight added later on. While these were targeted for the informal settlers, the lower and the middle classes, the more affluent could choose the areas of Sta. Mesa Heights or New Manila.

QUEZON CITY TODAY

The planned capital city may not have seen all plans to fruition, but it was the declared capital of the country from 1948 until 1976, when former president Ferdinand Marcos signed Presidential Declaration No. 940, reverting the capital to Manila. This might be because most of the plans of the capital city have never been fully realized.

But Quezon City today is a bright spot of development. It has consistently been declared the richest and most competitive among cities of Manila. It is the country's leading center for education, with many of the country's universities establishing their flagships in the city. Business is set to get a big boost, with the creation of new business centers that crawl towards the north of EDSA.

Quezon City may not be the planned capital that it was supposed to be, and Quezon's dreams may not exactly be what it has become now. But the future remains bright for this city, where development is not just a dream, but a reality. ■



Hon. Rebecca S. Ynares
GOVERNOR

THE RIGHT WAY

The culture of excellence prevails over the province of Rizal, three-time winner of the National Competitiveness Council's Most Competitive Province Award

BY GAY ACE DOMINGO
PHOTOGRPAHY RICKY LADIA



For the third year in a row, the province of Rizal has won the Most Competitive Province award given by the National Competitiveness Council (NCC), a government body that aims to push the country's Global Competitiveness Index ranking. The award was given at the 6th Regional Competitiveness Summit held at the Philippine International Convention Center last August 2018.

Developed by Spanish-American economist Xavier Sala-i-Martin and Spanish economist Elsa V. Artadi, the Global Competitiveness Index measures a country's ability to provide high levels of prosperity to its citizens. Following the standards set by the Global Competitive Index, the NCC evaluates the competitiveness of local government units based on four points: 1) Economic Dynamism, 2) Government Efficiency, 3) Infrastructure, and 4) Resiliency.

NCC's assessment of LGUs is an indicator for government officials and potential investors. For public executives, it shows whether or not services are being delivered to constituents and points to specific areas of improvement; for the private sector, it is a guide for determining where they could set up new businesses.

STRICT CRITERIA

Vying for NCC's nod is tough and tedious. Data submitted by municipalities and cities are verified by the Philippine Statistics Authority. "It's like going through the eye of a needle. The criteria are very strict," says Ms. Milagros "Mitos" Diestro-Trias, provincial planning and development officer of Rizal.

She elaborates, "For instance, NCC checks if the growth of revenue is on an upward trend. The facts must be backed up by the Department of Interior and Local Government Finance Department. Whatever data is submitted must tally with official records. LGUs cannot invent or make up the information."

Rizal got the Most Competitive Province of 2018 title since three of its municipalities did well in their respective categories; Taytay and Cainta ranked first and second respectively in the Most Competitive Municipality, while Antipolo came out fourth among the Most Competitive Component Cities in the Philippines.

In a statement released to media after the 6th Regional Competitive Summit, Rizal Governor Rebecca "Nini" Ynares said that the award affirms the hard work and cooperation of leaders and citizens. She declared, "It reflects the provincial government's effort in promoting social progress and better standards of life for the people. This recognition will also provide a more enabling business environment that will make Rizal the preferred place to do business in the country and will all the more inspire us to do our best for our people."

CURRENT GEOGRAPHY

Occupying a land area of 118,265 hectares or 1,182.65 square kilometers, Rizal is bounded by the provinces of Bulacan in the north, Quezon in the east, and Laguna in the south. It is home to 13 municipalities and one city: Angono, Antipolo, Baras, Binangonan, Cainta, Cardona, Jalajala, Morong, Pililia, Rodriguez, San Mateo, Tanay,



Taytay, and Teresa. Rizal inhabits one-fifth or 8.07 percent landmass of the progressive Calabarzon (formerly Southern Tagalog) Region composed of Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon.

Historically, Rizal's area scope used to be much bigger. However, in 1975, then President Ferdinand Marcos signed Presidential Decree 824 creating Metro Manila. As a result, areas that were part the province of Rizal – such as Marikina, Mandaluyong, Pasig, and Taguig – were placed under Metro Manila.

Marikina, Mandaluyong, Pasig, and Taguig, as we know, are among the country's most dynamic cities. Had Rizal retained authority over these key parts, perhaps the provinces' financial resources might have been much wealthier.

Yet, as the Most Competitive Province award ably demonstrates, Rizal has managed to do well.

TOURISM AND ECONOMIC HUBS

Big business is very evident; the major investors in Rizal include the biggest local corporations like Ayala, Robinsons, Sta. Lucia, Fil-Estate, and SM. The province's proximity to Metro Manila, cool climate, and scenic environment make it a good location to live in. "That has led to an increase in population due to migration, and in turn, an increase in the investments sector," reveals Ms. Trias.

Not only is Rizal a thriving economic zone, it is also rich in culture and tourism.

Rizal offers destinations for families and tourists: Avilon Zoo and Wawa Dam in Rodriguez, Tres Escalon Falls in Taytay, the Wind Farm in Pililia, Daranak Falls and Masungi Falls in Tanay, the Gorge in Montalban, and Hinulugang Taktak in Antipolo.

For history and art buffs, there are the churches of St. Jerome in Morong, Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage in Antipolo, and St. Joseph in Baras; the Blanco Family Museum in Angono, and the Petroglyphs in Binangonan.

Rizal is also the site of major Filipino celebrations like the Maytime Fiesta in Antipolo and the Gigantes Festival in Angono.

Ms. Trias, adds, "We are also proud to say that Rizal is the cradle of four National Artists, namely painters Vicente Manansala and Botong Francisco, and musicians Lucio San Pedro and Francisco Feliciano."

Y.E.S. TO PROGRESS AND PEACE

Crucial to Rizal's status as Most Competitive Province is Governor Nini Ynares' flagship Ynares Eco System (or Y.E.S., for short), which is anchored on the principles of cleaning, greening, and recycling.

Says Ms. Trias, "Gov. Nini's concern is to protect the people and the environment as she did during her first administration as governor of the province of Rizal in 2001 to 2004."

Some of Gov. Ynares' many, many key activities and projects are the establishment of



provincial-wide cleanliness drives, the rise of Taytay as the nation’s garments capital, the development of alternative energy in the Pililia Wind Farm, rehabilitation of children in conflict with the law through the Bahay Pag-Asa house, and management of materials recovery facilities in the barangays.

Another key project is Oplan Busilak (busilak means “pure” in Filipino) — the major clearing of waterways leading to the Laguna Lake and Manila Bay.

Rizal is also a relatively orderly and peaceful province. In fact, in 2015, the Philippine National Police declared it as a “Conflict Manageable Area.” Says Ms. Trias, “When it comes to security, we do have occasional problems but in Calabarzon, Rizal has the lowest crime rate.”

Unlike other places where conflict arises due to differences in political allegiances, Ms. Trias is proud to report, “Our political atmosphere is relatively serene.”

Staff members from other local governments have traveled to Rizal to learn about the latter’s best practices. At visits such as these, Ms. Trias has heard about problems due to differences in political affiliations. “LGUs tell me, ‘Our provincial board refuses to approve a project because the beneficiary is a (political) enemy.’ That is why infrastructure projects are not implemented properly... Thankfully, that is not the case in Rizal. Kasi sa amin, okay naman.”

OPEN TO EVERYONE

Ms. Trias emphasizes that the provincial government grants requests based on need and not on political connections. She says, “Halimbawa, Baras at Antipolo parehong may request para sa project, pwedeng sabihin, ‘Antipolo, ikaw naman ay mayaman, ibibigay muna namin (ang budget) sa Baras which is a third-class municipality.’ (For example, if Baras and Antipolo both requested for funds for a project, we could say ‘Antipolo, you are already rich; we will allot the budget to Baras first, which is a third-class municipality.’)”

Thus, it is not surprising that Rizal has built a wide and well-made road network, so much so that

Department of Public Works and Highways has recognized it as the Province with the Best Road Networks.

Whether you are a politician from an opposing political party, or a tricycle driver, or a teacher, or whoever, as long as you have a genuine concern to be brought to attention of the provincial government, you will have the time of day. Governor Ynares assures that she will give you an audience. She says, “My office is open to all socio-economic and political classes. Everybody’s welcome to come here... We entertain different kinds of people.”

SURPRISE AWARD

LEAGUE Magazine experienced Governor Ynares’ accommodating nature firsthand when she allowed the team’s editorial, photo, and videography teams to have a quick shoot and interview with her. On that afternoon, the governor was reportedly in the thick of staffing issues for a provincial hospital scheduled for opening in a few weeks.

In spite of her busy-ness, the governor shared her views, including an interesting sidelight about the first time Rizal won the Most Competitive Province award in 2016. She says sincerely, “It really caught me by surprise because we were invited to come to PICC... We were unprepared that we managed to be the Most Competitive Province in the Philippines.”

The esteemed leader shares this story to underscore the culture of excellence in the province. She says, “The fact that we won without preparing for it means that it is how we work here at the Capitol. It’s really how we do things here.”

The governor notes that with the influx of business and industries into Rizal, she hopes she can be able to generate more employment. “So that people here don’t have to travel and pay for transportation; even in their place of residence, they can find work.”

For Governor Nini Ynares of Rizal, winning awards will always be nice rewards, yet service to its over two million population is still the greater fulfillment. “Awards inspire us to work harder; but with or without them, we are committed to do what is best for the people of Rizal.”





Young visionary, mayor christian natidad, leads Malolos city, bulacan, in its pursuit of social reform

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

BY RHODA OSALVO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIGUEL CORTEZ

Some people buckle down under pressure; some wouldn't even think of going through it and quit. Only a few dare venture and come out of it victorious. One of them is Christian Natividad, the incumbent mayor of Malolos City.

The son of the late Congressman Teodulo "Teddy" Natividad, Christian grew up with his grandparents, mother Matilde, and brother Chester. He only saw his father once or twice a year on special occasions as his father had to attend to his busy political life and his first family.

Despite that, little Christian didn't hold any grudge against his dad but looked up to him with much pride and reverence. During the interview with *LEAGUE*, his face beams as he reminisced about his father, his accomplishments and vision for the province of Bulacan.

"The greatest inheritance I got from my father is not the material things he gave me but my character. Who I am now is because of him," says the local chief executive.

It was no surprise that at age six, he wanted to be a politician like Cong Teddy; he wanted to be

a mayor. His father was against it and so were the odds. With his stature then, it proved to be a difficult climb. As it was with transforming Malolos into a progressive city that it is now.

GROWING UP

A believer in the importance of education, his parents ensured he received the best education. He went to private schools up until college.

At 19, this third-year college student had to man up when his dad died of prostate cancer, leaving him and his family with nothing. He promised his mom that he would send his younger brother, then on his third year in high school, and himself to school. He learned to juggle work and his studies selling encyclopedias during the day and was the guitar man for a band at night. He followed a punishing schedule; leisure became a luxury.

His class at UST was from 3:00 PM to 7:00 PM and show time started at 9:00 PM. By 3:00 or 4:00 AM, he would be riding a jeepney from Manila back to his home in Bulacan. His tired body would summon rest between 6:00 to 7:00 AM. By noon, he would be up and out of the



Mayor Christian makes sure not to miss an opportunity to touch base with his constituents during People's Day

house with his books and his guitar by 1:30 PM. Then there was his responsibility to the community.

POLITICAL LIFE

Christian had his first taste of public service during his college days when the mayor at that time appointed him as Sangguniang Kabataan chairman because nobody ran for the post. With his community projects, including setting up with fellow leaders a campaign against drugs known as KAPANALIG or Kabataang Panlalawigan na Nagkakaisa Laban sa Ipinagbabawal na Gamot— which earned him a citation from the Philippine National Police in 1998—people started to notice him.

Fresh out of college and after his SK term, 20-year-old Christian became the youngest municipal councilor in 1998. The untiring public servant continued to juggle his time when he entered law school. By 2001, he again ran and won as councilor in Malolos; landing the number one slot for the second time. It seemed like things were falling into place for the boy who wanted to be mayor. But three years later,

his political career took a screeching halt when his first bid for mayoralty proved unsuccessful in 2004.

“I lost by a small margin but it taught me a lot about politics,” says the third-termer local chief.

He used this time to recoup. He taught at the Southeast Asian College, Inc. from 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM and transferred to FEU Law School where he attended classes from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM. Driven to succeed, this Dean’s Lister read for six to eight hours every night and graduated at the top of his class in 2007.

In the same year, he was invited by the governor to join his slate for the provincial board. But this new lawyer was reluctant to get back in the game. “Coming from a loss, I hesitated 30 or 40 times. I said I wanted to be a lawyer at NBI or be part of the National Police Commission or NAPOLCOM, the agency that my dad created and loved so much. That’s what his dream was for me,” he recalls.

Somehow, he couldn’t say no to the people’s clamor and when they had spoken, he became number one provincial board member in the first district of Bulacan. From then on, success came one after the other. He passed the bar in 2009





and a year later, at 32, without money for the campaign, the charismatic public servant pulled it through and became the youngest ever elected mayor in the history of Malolos.

That’s probably how he earned his moniker, Agila ng Bulakan. For he soared above the overwhelming challenges fate threw at him. But apparently, his trials didn’t end when he realized his dream.

It was another uphill climb. When the new mayor took his seat, the city hall’s financial state was in the red. On his first week, he had to negotiate to keep its electricity running. The numbers in the education sector looked appalling.

“The ideal classroom to student ratio is 1:45. In Malolos, the ratio that time was 1:96. How can the students learn? Also, we had the highest dropout and incompleteness rates in secondary school,” he says.

Agila ng Bulakan knew exactly what was expected of him—a lot of hard work—something he has been doing all his life. Again, he took up the challenge, not for himself or for his family but for his city.

EDUCATION IS KEY

Mayor Christian believes in investing in human capital. “In the long run, the return of investment is higher if I spend more on the people—on our youth, the family.”

For starters, he explains, “After two years as mayor, we erased those numbers. We built more classrooms and our ratio now is 1:40; even better than the standard. Now, we have one high

school for every three *barangays* and we’re still constructing.” Local budget is also allocated for technical-vocational and college scholarships.

He also talks about changing the mindset of the people, especially the youth, to eradicate poverty. “We should teach them to dream. I wanted to build a city that people can call their home, one with a good standard of living where they plan their dreams. I say plan because they know that in Malolos, their dreams can happen. They can achieve their dreams. *Di lang basta pangarap.*”

MALOLOS TODAY

If you go to the city of Malolos today, you will find yourself in a place bustling with energy and enthusiasm. You can sense that excitement in the air and in the faces of its folks. All sorts of businesses line up the busy highways and the inner roads. Everywhere you look teems with activities that relax as you move away from the center of the city.

Under the able leadership of Mayor Natividad, Malolos received several citations that are noteworthy, like the Seal of Good Local Governance and Seal of Good Housekeeping from the DILG and another from the BIR as one of the top LGUs that contributed significantly to the enhancement of the agency’s tax administration and operations; these aside from the tourism and festival awards.

Browsing at the numbers will show the city’s transformation in a span of eight years. Malolos does not solely depend on its IRA or internal

(Clockwise from top left) Starting the workweek with flag ceremony; with Vice Mayor Engr. Gilbert Gatchalian at the 120th Malolos Congress; giving aid to those affected by Typhoon Ondoy



Malolos City hosted last February 18 the first Republika Ride, participated in by 1,400 motorbike riders. With him in photo are (right) Retired Police Director Fernando Pace, founder of the Law Enforcers Riders Association of the Philippines (LERAP), and Psupt. Col. Heryl L. Bruno.

revenue allotment. By introducing reforms, it has improved its income by leaps and bounds and it even makes more than its share from the national government budget.

HOW DID THE CITY DO IT?

“For one, businesses are declaring their actual income. More opened shops because they say, we energized the city. People have confidence in our governance. We know how to manage our money. Compared to others, our income is small and yet we are able to provide social services better than the bigger cities,” says the local chief executive.

The city’s programs and projects for farmers and fisherfolks, senior citizens, education, healthcare, and other social services including rice subsidy for bereaved families are exemplary, according to the standards of the Association of

Local Social Welfare and Development Officers of the Philippines Inc. and the DSWD such that the Malolos’s three-term mayor has been awarded as the Most Outstanding Mayor thrice and now belongs to its hall of fame.

In crafting policies, the mayor likes to engage and involve his fellowmen. “I like consulting with the people when it comes to policies. I let them give solutions to their problems. For example, if it’s a traffic problem, I convene those in the transport sector—even the tricycle drivers. When it comes to farming and fishing, I listen to farmers and fishermen because I know that a lawyer like me can never be wiser than a farmer or a fisherman when it comes to farming or fishing.”

In 2010, Malolos was number 23 among the 24 local government units of Bulacan in terms of harvest or yield per hectare. After dialogues, reforms, and actual implementation of existing laws like collecting taxes from idle lands to encourage landowners to start planting, the city, like its topnotch mayor, became number one in this category by 2013.

To engage the youth, he brought in basketball, extreme sports, and other activities that attract attention to the city.

With its resources, infrastructure, and a promising future, the historic Malolos was recognized as one of the Top Ten Next Wave Cities in the Philippines by the DOST-ICTO, Information Technology and Business Process Association of the Philippines (IBPAP), and Leechiu Property Consultants in 2016.

Now it is happening. The Malolos City Central



Transport Terminal was inaugurated this January. The mayor reveals, “We were able to put up this project worth 350 million pesos, without spending money from the city coffers but through the public-private partnership with Xentro Mall. My vision is now a reality.” The impressive structure houses not only public utility vehicles but it also serves as a business center that offers more than 3,000 jobs for Bulakenyos.



(From top) People's Day is held every Monday to Wednesday, where Mayor Christian personally attends to the needs of his constituents; the mayor officiates the Kasalang Bayan, held every Wednesday; entertaining young visitors in his office

Mayor Christian has another PPP project in the offing which is worth 2.2 billion pesos – the Heritage Center of the Philippines – which will also house a techno-hub for the private component that is estimated to attract new businesses, 12,000 new jobs and taxpayers for the city.

NEXT MOVES

It is no secret that Malolos's beloved and pride is now setting his eyes on the gubernatorial seat. But if it were up to him, he would rather exit the political race and focus his attention on his children. “Speaking from the heart, I really want to devote time for my kids. I want to spend more time with them while they're young.”



But that would also mean leaving his bigger family, his higher calling.

Twenty of the 24 mayors in his home province, including congressmen and women and other prominent officials, have appealed to him to lead them for they believe in his innovative management style.

“They say I am a risk taker and I have unorthodox ways. I like to experiment. It's really my personality,” he says.

So far, his experiments seem to be working his way and that of his people. He has energized the sleepy Malolos, and even the adjacent towns are reaping the rewards.

As in his student days, the mayor continues to be creative, resourceful, and persevering in his ways. What he did for Malolos, the local leaders and most likely the Bulakenyos, trust he can do for their province also. And so does he. █





UNBREAKABLE

Challenging life experiences polished one of Cebu's most brilliant leaders. LEAGUE traveled all the way to the boondocks of Tuburan, Cebu to meet Mayor Democrito 'Aljun' Diamante and find out what his plans are after his nine-year term

BY LAKAMBINI BAUTISTA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL GOTIONG

Mayor Democrito "Aljun" Diamante refers to himself as a politician driven by circumstances. He didn't come from a political family, nor did it cross his mind that he would become a public servant someday. Like the 10 million Filipinos today, Mayor Aljun's family was also challenged by poverty.

He was the eldest in a brood of eight, so he took it upon himself to help his father provide for their family's needs. "*Noon, ang ambisyon ko lang ay magkaroon ng hanapbuhay, makatulong sa magulang at mga kapatid ko. Kung magkaroon man ako ng pamilya, ang pangarap ko lang ay mapakain, mapaaral, mapabahay, mapadamit sila, ganun lang. Hindi ako nangangarap ng masyadong malaki* (Back then, my ambition in life was to have a job, help my parents and siblings. If I ever get to have my own family, I'd like to be able to provide them with food, education, shelter, clothing—that's it)," he says.

After finishing high school, the native Tuburanon went to the city to work. He took a variety of odd jobs, before landing a position in a logistics company. He worked his way up the career ladder—from being a driver, clerk, and processor, to becoming a supervisor, manager for sales, and manager for operations. After 10 years of working for that company, he decided to resign and build his own company. "*Nakatulong ako sa kompanyang pinagtrabahuhan ko, napalaki ko...sabi ko sa sarili ko, kung magtatayo siguro ako ng sarili kong kompanya, baka sakaling lumaki din* (I was able to help the company I worked for, I helped it grow, so I told myself, if I build my own company, I could probably grow it as well)," he remembers. True enough, his diligence and hard work paid off. The logistics company he built flourished.

These life experiences—the ups and downs—ignited his desire to help better the lives of others. "*Galing kasi ako sa wala e. Kaya noong nabigyan ako ng pagkakataon at ng grasya, binigyan ako ng pagkakataong makapagserbisyo sa mga mahihirap, bumalik ako sa amin at tumakbong mayor* (I came from zero. That is why when I was given the opportunity and grace to serve the poor, I went back to our town and ran for mayor)," he declares.

CALL TO SERVE

Mayor Aljun tells *LEAGUE Magazine* that he used to walk six kilometers during his elementary days, and 14 kilometers during his high school days, to get to school. So when he won the mayoralty race in 2011, his main priority was education. "*Noong maging mayor ako, nagtayo agad ako ng tatlong high schools sa bundok* (When I became mayor, I immediately built three high schools in the mountains)," he quips. One is 15 kilometers from the town proper and located at the boundary of Catmon and Tuburan; one in Kabangkalan, which is at the center of Tuburan; and one in Kansí, which is at the boundary of Asturias. For the first two schools, it was Mayor Aljun who bought the lot (one-hectare for each) with his own money. He and DepEd agreed that he will build the high schools and shoulder the salary of the teachers during the first year. Then on the following year, DepEd will allot budget for it.

Through the help of his fellow public servants, these projects were completed. By 2012, they were able to provide 82 teachers to the three high schools they built. "I always say, providing educa-

tion is the first step to overcoming poverty,” he stresses.

Mayor Aljun also prioritized building roads in all the *barangays*, so the power distributor can bring their equipment to these areas. He happily reports that all *barangays* in Tuburan now have electricity.

In 2011, he started an outreach program that would become his administration’s battle cry—that is, bringing services closer to the people. “We brought government services to the *barangays* once a week,” he says. For the past seven years, and until now, they have sustained the services which include free dental care, medical checkup, payment of taxes, etc. Vice Mayor Danny Tuburan, on the other hand, provided free snacks.

BIGGER DREAMS

His term ends next year, but he hopes to continue serving—perhaps as a congressman—so he can push for the continuous development of the towns and *barangays* in his district. He firmly believes that through federalism, more projects can reach far-flung areas like Tuburan.

“Ang iniisip ko, kung itong 237 barangays ng third district, mabigyan ko lang ng semento na worth P500,000, malaking bagay na y’un. Pwedeng sa kanila ang labor, sa akin ang semento. Kung mabigyan mo ang bawat barangay every year,

siguro in the next three to five years, lahat ng sitio ng mga barangay sementado na ang kalsada (I’m thinking if I can provide cement worth P500,000 to all 237 barangays in the third district, that would already be a great help. I can provide the cement, they can take care of the labor. If we do that every year, in the next three to five years, all sitios in the barangays would be cemented,” he says.

He has big dreams for his district, which includes building an international port, for businesses to come in. Also, by having bigger roads, he hopes to encourage investors to establish businesses in the countryside; this will, in turn, help decongest the city and ease traffic.

“I organized a summit among mayors of the province of Cebu last June 21, and we discussed their vision for their respective municipalities. We will have to create a workshop for



(From top) The modest structure houses the Office of the Mayor, Office of the Municipal Administrator, Tourism Department, and Tuburan Museum; one of the schools built during by Mayor Aljun; one of the landmarks in Tuburan, the San Antonio de Padua Parish Church





“I always say, providing education is the first step to overcoming poverty.”





those priority projects, so these can be included in the plans of the province. Hopefully, these projects can be proposed to the development council, so the national government can fund these,” shares Mayor Aljun, who also happens to be the president of the League of Mayors in Cebu, and the vice president of the League of Mayors in Visayas.

To boost tourism in Tuburan, Mayor Aljun plans to build a high-end resort in Molobolo Springs through public-private partnership (PPP), and develop the 2.8-km Adela River into Cebu’s version of Loboc River, to provide recreation such as speedboat and Jet Ski rides.

To provide livelihood for his people, Mayor Aljun plans to build zip-lines, cable cars, a mountain resort, a hotel, and pension houses. This way, they can accommodate local and foreign tourists.

“Our municipality is 29,360 hectares, our coastline is 20 kilometers. *Kung ma-develop natin ito, lahat aangat. Y’un ang tinatawag nating inclusive growth. Walang maiiwan* (If we develop this, everyone’s life will improve. That’s what we call inclusive growth. No one will be left behind),” he asserts.

Mayor Aljun only has words of gratitude for the people of Tuburan, who have given him their trust and support for the past nine years. *“Nagpapasalamat ako sa pagkakataong ibinigay nila sa akin upang makapagserbisyo sa aking bayan at mag-ing bahagi ng kasaysayan* (I would like to thank the people of Tuburan for allowing me to serve my town and for allowing me to be part of history),” he concludes. ■



The San Antonio de Padua Parish Church was built in 1857, six years after the town was established.



The name of the town comes from the Cebuano word “tubod,” which means spring. The place was named Tuburan since it has numerous springs spread in and around the boundary of the town.





WHAT COFFEE DREAMS ARE MADE OF

Tuburan, Cebu's 'Coffee Prince,' Mayor Aljun Diamante, tells us about his town's quest to becoming the Coffee Capital of the Visayas

BY LAKAMBINI BAUTISTA

Cebu is known for iconic Pinoy food such as *lechon*, *chicharon*, *torta*, dried mangoes, and *otap*. But in recent years, it's becoming known for the distinct taste of its local brew. Tuburan coffee, which is organically grown in this mountainous town of Cebu, is now recognized as the official coffee of the province. One of the popular local coffee shops there, Coffee Dream, as well as Marco Polo Plaza Cebu, source their coffee from the town of Tuburan. Radisson Blu, on the other hand, offers the refreshing goodness of Tuburan ice cream.

The unique flavor of Tuburan coffee could be attributed to wind and location, says City Administrator Steve Salipot. Unlike the coffee in Batangas and Cavite, which are grown in the lowlands, Tuburan coffee is grown almost 2,000 feet above sea level, so it doesn't capture salty water. Its Robusta seedlings came from Tagum, Davao del Norte, the same seedlings used by global brand Nestle, but planted on very high ground.

COFFEE CHRONICLES

This dream to become the Coffee Capital of the Visayas all started out as a livelihood project initiated by Mayor Aljun Diamante, now currently serving his third term as town chief. "*Ang hangarin ko ay matulungan ang mga Tuburanon na maiangat sa kahirapan. Sa awa ng Diyos, nagkaroon kami ng isang livelihood project, itong coffee plantation. (My foremost goal is to help Tuburanons rise above poverty. With God's grace, we now have a livelihood project, this coffee plantation),*" he says.

His idea was born in 2012, when Tuburan adopted Department of Environment and Natural Resources's (DENR) national training program. Seven hundred hectares of land were donated to the town of Tuburan, and DENR offered to pay P7 for every tree planted. "I told the DENR that it would be best to plant fruit-bearing trees, lest people will just turn these into charcoal. Then, we agreed that coffee is a viable choice," he shares.

Mayor Aljun sought the assistance of Nestlé Philippines, which generously lent its technical knowledge in coffee growing. He was told that if he can get seedlings from Tagum, Davao del Norte, Nestlé could send a technician to help. Raring to get the project up and running, he immediately bought the seedlings and built a training center in Tuburan. With the help of Nestlé's technician, they were able to build a nursery, that paved the way to starting Tuburan's coffee farm.

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 88

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FROM PAGE 86

WORKING TOGETHER

Adhering to the same objective of helping the poor, National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) regional director, Efren Carreon, offered to help by pooling together government agencies in a convergence that aims to grow the coffee industry in Tuburan. “*Sabiny sa akin, ‘Mayor, mag-usap tayo kung paano natin matutulungan ang mahihirap.’ Sabi ko, ‘Director, bisitahin mo ang coffee plantation ko sa bundok. More than 1,000 farmers ang matutulungan doon.’ Noong pinuntahan nya, sabi nya, ‘hindi na pala tayo kailangang mag-isip pa.’* (He told me, ‘Mayor, let’s talk about how we can help the poor.’ I said, ‘Director, why don’t you visit our coffee plantation in the mountains. We’ll be able to help 1,000 farmers there.)” recalls

Mayor Aljun.

The convergence started in 2015, and support from different sectors has since poured in. Line agencies of local and national government have formed the Technical Working Group to assist the 17 people’s organizations engaged in coffee farming. These include NEDA, Department of Agriculture, Philippine Coconut Authority, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Labor and Employment, Philippine Fiber Industry Authority, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office, Provincial Agriculture Office, Cooperative Development Authority, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Agrarian Reform, National Irrigation Administration, Department of Interior and Local Government, Department of Science and Technology, Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Tourism, and the Philippine Statistics Authority.

“*Ang palagi ko lang sinasabi sa mga farmers, ingatan nila at magsipag sila dahil sila din naman ang makikinabang dito* (What I always tell the farmers is to take care of what’s been given to them, work hard because in the end, they are also the ones to benefit from it),” he says. The project has also received enormous support from the business sector, like the Cebu Chamber of Commerce, that buys their products. “*Masaya akong maraming gustong tumulong sa mga mahihirap* (I am happy that many people

want to help the poor).”

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD

Mayor Aljun has high hopes for the people of Tuburan, and he admits that his nine-year term as mayor may not be enough. So he’s hoping that his brother, Vice Mayor Danny Diamante, will win in the 2019 elections to continue what he started.

“In the next five to 10 years, through hard work and the help of our people, we hope that there will be no more poorest of the poor in Tuburan,” he says.

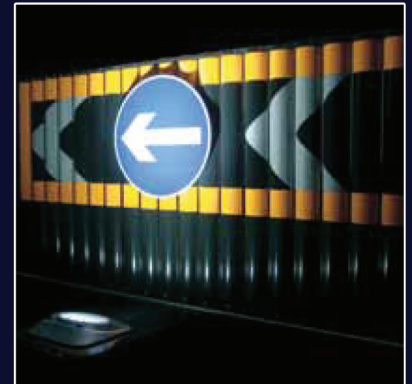
One of Mayor Aljun’s advocacies is to encourage the youth to study agriculture. “Before, no one wants to take up agriculture. We’ve been offering the course at Cebu Technological University. But parents would often say, ‘*Bakit namin pakukuhanin ng kursong agrikultura ang mga anak namin, e magsasaka naman kami?*’ (Why would we want our kids to take up agriculture, when we are already farmers?)” So I would explain to them that this is not all about traditional farming but modern methods of farming, employing scientific approach.”

By having home-grown agriculturists, Mayor Aljun is hoping that Tuburan can also grow high-value crops, to boost their economy. He has already donated eight hectares of his land to a *barangay* in the mountains, to serve as an extension school and research center, especially for coffee. Likewise, they are now beginning to grow bananas and abaca, and doing research on growing dragon fruits.

Mayor Aljun is positive that through education and research, he can empower the people of Tuburan to sustain their town’s livelihood program and encourage them to explore and develop the God-given natural riches that are entrusted to them. ■



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MAN ON A MISSION

Barangay Capt. Benhur Cruz is on a quest to bring Poblacion, Makati to new heights, preserve its roots, and unite its people

BY HELEN HERNANE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIEL SORIANO

In just the span of a few years, Brgy. Poblacion has rapidly grown into a thriving business and cultural hub that caters to tourists and locals alike. With its streets full of restaurants and bars, the once sleepy *barangay* has transformed into the place to be, especially for foodies and alcohol enthusiasts. And in the center of it all is none other than Brgy. Capt. Benhur L. Cruz.

NEW IMAGE

Since assuming office in 2010, Cruz has actively sought for a change in Brgy. Poblacion's image. For him, pre-existing establishments, such as El Chupacabra and Heckle and Jeckle Sports Bar, are huge factors on how Poblacion achieved the "facelift" it needs. But he knew that in order to flip its image completely, he would have to open its doors to everyone. In the *barangay's* mission and vision, you could clearly see that one of their objectives is "conducive environment for business to flourish."

As the center of Makati, its prime location has not gone unnoticed by entrepreneurs and so it didn't take long until its streets were crawling with people in search of great food and drinks. Dozens of establishments have opened up in Poblacion since Cruz became *barangay* captain.

Of course, hand-in-hand with its development, a problem arises for the community and his office to resolve—noise pollution. "Poblacion is like a province within a city. We're used to the silence," Cruz says. He notes how drunken customers would often make noise until the wee hours of the morning. "So the once quiet Poblacion is now disturbed," he adds.

With peace and order as his top priority, he encouraged the people to participate in keeping the *barangay* safe. Through Crime Watch, he handed out radios so that the residents can do their part. But aside from making sure that the neighborhood is peaceful, Cruz

also aims to keep the streets clear from drugs. With the recent news of multiple raids into bars within the area, keeping Poblacion drug-free is one of his major goals.

According to Cruz, Poblacion has changed significantly since the launch of President Duterte’s drug war. He also notes the huge drop in crime rate as one of the top results of the anti-drug campaign. For its residents who, in his words, “have lost their way to drugs,” Poblacion has a Comprehensive Rehabilitation Program that gets them back on track. This initiative partially secures another one of its objectives, which is a “safe, secure, eco-friendly neighborhood,” proving once again that its mission and vision statements are more than just platitudes for people to gloss over. For Makati, or at least here in Brgy. Poblacion, they aren’t just words.

OLD AND NEW

Despite all the changes in Barangay Poblacion in recent years, one thing remains, which Cruz is adamant to maintain—culture. More specifically, religious events which are not commonly witnessed anymore in the bustling streets of Metro Manila.

As Makati’s center of culture and tradition, the *barangay* has big shoes to fill. And every year, especially during Holy Week, the residents wear it with a smile. They hold an annual Lenten Procession and also celebrate the Dance of the Virgins, which praises their patron saints—Peter, Paul, and Virgen de la Rosa or Lady of the Rose. More than just a tradition, the community’s devotion to upholding Holy Week traditions is initially what inspired Cruz to keep striving for a solid neighborhood.

ONE POBLACION

When asked about his projects, Cruz emphasizes the unity of the community. “The magic of this place is the residents and what we do, which is to include them in everything. We make sure they’re involved,” he proudly says. In order for every project to be carried out perfectly, his office coordinates with the SK or Sangguniang Kabataan and church-based institutions within Poblacion to make sure that everyone is working towards the *barangay’s* improvement.

Now, the *barangay* is as solid as a rock. After sitting for a few minutes in the lobby of Poblacion’s quaint *barangay*

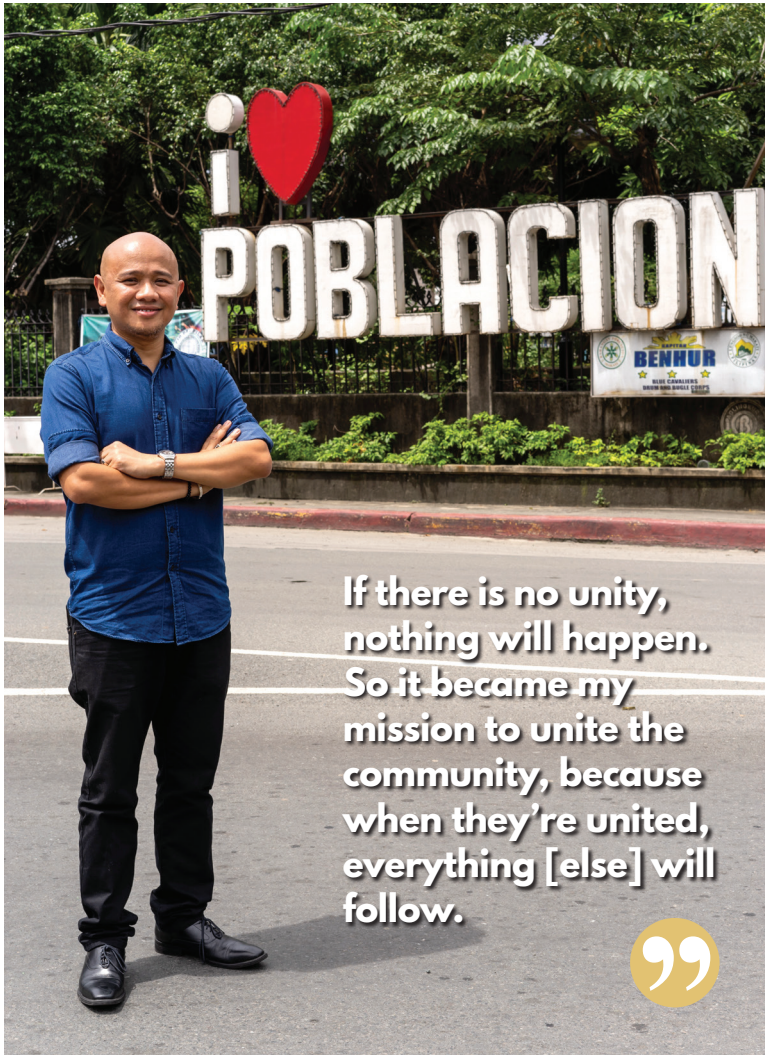
hall situated at the corner of J.P. Rizal and Mabini, one could arrive at the conclusion that this community is genuinely tight-knit. Everyone seems to know each other by name and sincerely cares for one another in a way that makes even passing visitors feel at home almost immediately.

But then again, it didn’t always start out that way. Cruz had his fair share of frustrations, especially at the beginning. “When I was elected, what I saw was a divided *barangay*. And no matter what the government does, if there is no unity, nothing will happen. So it became my mission to unite the community, because when they’re united, everything [else] will follow.”



“The magic of this place is the residents and what we do, which is to include them in everything. We make sure they’re involved,” says Barangay Captain Benhur Cruz.





If there is no unity,
nothing will happen.
So it became my
mission to unite the
community, because
when they're united,
everything [else] will
follow.



And so, One Poblacion began. It was, and continues to be, his most ambitious project. He also considers it as his biggest achievement to date, despite numerous awards the *barangay* has received. “That became my project—community and government working as one,” he says.

Another point of pride for him is his ability to communicate openly with everyone. This includes people who competed against him and even those who curse him. “It’s not easy for us public servants to swallow our pride so we can do what we need to do for the *barangay*,” he quips. “But get rid of politics...For me, everyone is on equal footing.”

SAVING LIVES

Public service is not glamorous, but what makes it all worth it for Cruz is quite simple. It is seeing the happy, grateful faces of the people he serves. For him, the best aspect of being a *barangay* official is taking part in Poblacion’s rescue team. For eight years, prior to becoming the *barangay* captain, he served the community by driving ambulances and volunteering as a fireman.

“When you see the people you’ve helped, there’s no need for them to say ‘thank you.’ It’s enough that when you get home, you think to yourself ‘I helped someone today...I helped their family members and loved ones get home safe,’” Cruz says.

Many of his ongoing projects also help to improve the lives of the *barangay*’s residents. Adopt a Student program provides monthly allowance to its scholars. Another that has been in operation since 2017 is the Nobody to Somebody program, a rehab program done in cooperation with Makati’s Anti-Drug Abuse Council. The participants get to participate in worthwhile activities such as recollection, field trips, and painting.

FAMILY MATTERS

Upon entering his office, you will immediately notice two things—the life-size statue of a saint facing the door and the multiple picture frames decorating the wall, most of which feature his family. A loving husband to his wife, Rizabele, and father of four adorable children, Cruz effortlessly recites their complete names: Marvin Dexter, Xebastian Carlisle, Xamantha Ckishe, and Xabino Clyve Benhur.



Team Barangay Poblacion from right: Bianca Marie Ragadio, accounting officer; Marissa SG Fabillon, secretary; Michael Gonzales, Brgy. Administrator; Stephen Mark Estrella, personal aide; and Miko Villena, kagawad.

Every politician and public servant knows the struggle of finding time to spend with family and friends without compromising his or her duties to the people. Cruz shares that he initially set Sunday as a day for his family, but he soon realized that it is not possible.

“For example, I’m not doing anything. I don’t have a schedule and I’m waiting for something to happen or an emergency for me to attend to, I give them my time,” he says, referring to his family. After all, serving the people knows no schedule. But with years of experience, also comes wisdom.

The University of Santo Tomas alumnus has been in public service since he was 19 years old. After joking that he chose the course with the least math involved, he confessed that he didn’t have a goal and took whichever was open. And so he graduated with a degree in B.S. Commerce, major in Management. During his time in college, he served as an SK (Sangguniang Kabataan) Chairman. After which, Cruz was elected as a *kagawad* for three straight terms. It seems public service came to him naturally.

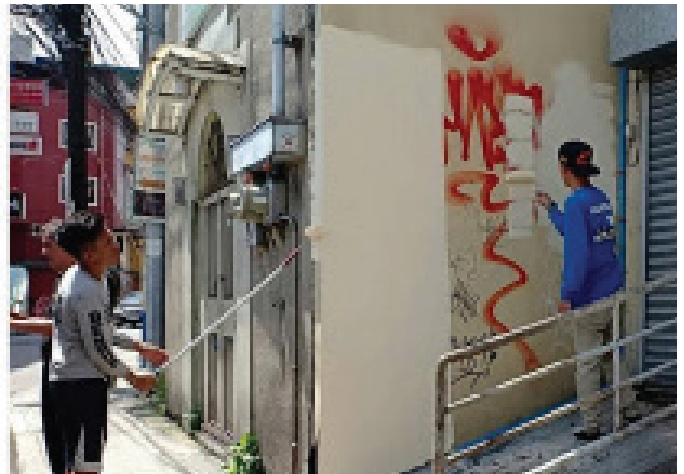
When asked about his inspiration for becoming a public servant, Cruz considers his grandfather as one of his biggest influences. His grandfather is none other than the former *barangay* captain of Brgy. Poblacion—Melecio Laurente, who served during the time of former Makati City Mayor Nemesio Yabut. But their similarities don’t end



there. Many residents note that Cruz is just like his grandfather, referring to their shared tendency to not charge small-time stores.

Excellence, Service, and Unity. These are the three core values of *Barangay* Poblacion. With Benhur Cruz at the helm, these values are not only put up in a plaque for display purposes, they are exemplified in everything the *barangay* does. Together with its residents, Cruz has awakened the neighborhood into what it is today—a cultural tourist hub frequented by food and beverage lovers. More importantly, it is a united community brought together by kindness and dedication. It is One Poblacion. | ■

For eight years, prior to becoming the *barangay* captain, he served the community by driving ambulances and volunteering as a fireman.



Two of the projects that Brgy. Capt. Benhur spearheaded—Crimewatch and Operation Vandalism

Angels Among Us

The A-HA! Learning Center provides free after-school tutoring to academically challenged public school students

BY MALOU ROSAL



A degree is much like that golden ticket that allows entry into a world of opportunities and possibilities. That is why children are started off young, with elementary subjects getting more and more progressive each year. But what if a child has challenges with comprehension or cannot focus properly? The tried-and-tested solution is after-school tutoring. However, some parents may not be able to afford this option.

Good thing good deeds are being done in Makati City through an organization called A-HA! Learning Center (A-HA! stands for “Angels here abound”). A project of the Commodore Jose Francisco Foundation, A-HA! serves public schools and communities in Makati City as the first free premium after-school center for public school students in the country.

For the last nine years, A-HA! has serviced around 2,500 students from grades one to 10. It “prides itself in creating high-end private school level materials for public school children, not

only to help them improve in their academics, but to build them up as resilient and independent thinkers. By having the skill set and perspective to become competitive in the 21st century market, each A-HA! student becomes a leader who can make meaningful change in their community,” shares Jatón Zulueta, founder and president.

Open five days a week, it currently serves over 120 underprivileged children aged six to 15 from five Makati public schools, especially those at risk of repeating a grade level or dropping out. Its holistic services include tutoring for reading, English, and math, values formation and mentorship, a feeding program, and a parents skills learning program.

Students who want to join A-HA!’s programs have to apply for a slot. Likewise, their parents apply too, and take a seminar for two weeks, after which they are assessed for approval. There are no tuition fees for the programs; instead, parents “pay” by volunteering to the center for three hours a month. While old students have an enrollment event, new students are usually recommended by

A-HA!'s partner public schools.

The center has four teachers who teach seven classes. There are also about 10 volunteer teachers who help kids with low comprehension. Students are evaluated by reading level and not necessarily by grades.

What sets A-HA! apart is its commitment to delivering high quality, private school-level content, which is meant to develop lifelong critical thinking skills in the students. This, in turn, will lead them to better career opportunities in the future. As a result, students have gotten higher grades in their report cards, won awards, made it to the top of their classes, and cited for their improving behavior in school.



A-HA! MOMENTS

At the helm of the A-HA! Learning Center is its founder and president, Jatón Zulueta. He started when he was just 19 years old, going into Manila South Cemetery on his own, gathering out-of-school youth living in the mausoleums, and teaching them basic reading and arithmetic.

He has since expanded the project from the cemetery into a brick-and-mortar four-classroom center, and has grown his core team from an original group of four to 50. The core members consist of *barangay* officials, school leaders, students, parents, church leaders, government workers, and private citizens.

Zulueta says, "Local government units (LGUs) can use this model by using the classrooms in the public

schools. By booking six extra learning hours after school, they can address many learning gaps. A-HA! can help train the

teachers and provide materials that will be ready to use. A big part of this effort is engaging the private sector. Because we live in Makati, our partners are varied; we have business leaders who can do business talks, sound engineers who can



help record the kids' songs, etc."

Right now, Zulueta and his team are busy listening to the community. They are working on a prototype, which will help break the cycle of poverty, by making the students R.I.C.H.—resilient workers, independent adults, critical thinkers, and helpful citizens. When the prototype is done, they will be working with the schools and communities.

He dreams of an A-HA! in every *barangay* across the Philippines—a safe space for kids to learn and express and explore themselves freely. "If you want to serve your country, serve by volunteering your genius," he says. | ■

Let's Drink to that!

Joe's Brew is continuously enjoying intense popularity among beer lovers

BY HELEN HERNANE



What exactly is it about beer that makes it a popular choice among Filipino drinkers? If you ask around, they would probably say it's for economic reasons, since beer is relatively cheaper than other alcoholic drinks and is readily available in stores. Also, unlike wine (where your choice is affected by what you're eating) or hard liquor (which has a much higher alcohol by volume, or ABV), beer has a "no fuss" nature that makes it the perfect go-to drink for any and every occasion.

And so when the two Viray brothers, Joe and Marco, set out to brew their own craft beer in 2013, they were already poised for success.

HOMEGROWN

They first started brewing five years ago in their own home. Joe had learned how to brew beer in the U.S. and when he came home, Joe's Brew was born. Then two years ago, they relocated to a different area in Poblacion and put up a brand new brewery and the tasting room.

"Poblacion just became Poblacion because of the great bars that had opened up. The people behind it are all creative, they're all good at it. And here there are no pretensions," Marco says, noting how other hangout places in Metro Manila have an exclusive, VIP atmosphere. "We don't have that here. We accept anyone, wherever you come from. That's what's great about Poblacion."

Aside from serving their beers in the tasting room, they also supply the beer for most establishments around Poblacion. Some of their many notable clients are Tambai, Ebi 10, Alchemy Bistro Bar, Bucky's, and The Smokeyard. When it comes to food, they have a partnership with Holy Smokes that serves food for both adjacent establishments.

FLASHBACK

One step into their bar and customers will be transported back in time. From the old-school yet fully-functional dumbwaiter in the corner to the retro refrigerator door, their bar embraces the vintage, industrial aesthetic. But more impressive than their interiors is their beers.

Most of the beers in their selection have a certain story to tell. "Like the 34th Pursuit IPA, [it's] inspired by our grandfather's World War 2 squadron," Marco says. Their grandfather, Ramon Zosa, fought alongside his unit in the Battle of the Philippines. Perhaps the bitter taste of 34th Pursuit IPA (Indian Pale Ale) is a nod to the squadron's resilience and strength.

On the other hand, some of their beers have no specific source or story in mind, but rather an image or a scene. For example, the Fish Rider is said to come from the idea of a "group of guys who like to ride motorcycles and surf."

True enough, their most famous beer can make you feel like you're lounging on the beach while watching the sunset rather than standing in the middle of Makati City.

For others who prefer something fruitier than bitter or citrus, one of their standard, intro beers is the Soothsayer. And if you're a fan of Blue Moon or Hoegaarden, then the Sierra Madre is the beer for you. "But everything really depends on the taste of the customer," Kirra, their bar manager, says.

BREWING UP A STORM

Right above their tasting room is their brewery which can be toured upon request. Their employees will gladly explain how they brew beer, which starts by grinding the grains which go straight into the mash tun. After boiling and other processes, it will ferment for three weeks before the beer can be transferred to a keg.

This December marks the second year anniversary of their tasting room, but they are just beginning. Their Makati brewery has a sibling in Vigan, Calle Brewery, and if all goes well, will have much more around the Philippines. By next year, they plan to open another brewery in Siargao and a fourth one in Subic. Who knows what the future holds for Joe's Brew? But if they're current rise is any indication, they are bound to take the country by storm. |

The Carmen Hotel

Comfort, Flexibility, Taste

The Carmen Hotel - Downtown Naga's Boutique Hotel - opened its doors in September 2016 and has since proven itself as a worthy addition to Naga City's myriad hotels and dining destinations.

Modern and contemporary architecture

The Carmen features extensive exterior cladding designed to embody the ebb and flow of The Naga River. Its tall and wide lobby draws the eyes with its clean and modern lines, and its floor-to-ceiling glass walls let in an abundance of natural light.

Location, location, location

The Carmen is located on Peñafrancia Avenue in Downtown Naga. It is a short walk from the hotel to downtown shops, restaurants, and tourist spots like Plaza Quince Martires, Naga Metropolitan Cathedral, and San Francisco Church. It is also a short jeepney or tricycle ride away from bustling Magsaysay or the malls of CBD II.

But The Carmen's strategic location is never more felt than during the month-long Peñafrancia Festival. The Traslacion passes through Peñafrancia Avenue right in front of the hotel, while the Fluvial Procession is held on the Naga River, which borders The Carmen at the back.

Flexible meetings and events arrangements

The Carmen is one-of-a-kind when it comes to meetings, functions and events. Its flexible meetings and events arrangements mean clients can rent just the venue and bring in food using any one of the hotel's accredited caterers - or they can get their food from the The Carmen's restaurant.

International-standard amenities

The Carmen's international-standard amenities ensure that guests would love staying in just as much as they would enjoy going out. It has a mini-gym and a swimming pool; in fact, The Carmen is the only hotel in the Naga Downtown area (i.e. Centro) with a swimming pool. Modern and minimalist interiors, plush and soft bedding, and individually-controlled air-conditioning make The Carmen's guest rooms an ideal place for rest and relaxation. Rooms are also outfitted with all the conveniences guests expect in a hotel of this caliber - hot and cold shower, toiletries and grooming necessities, a mini-refrigerator, an electronic safe, an iron and ironing board, extra pillows, a hair dryer, slippers, and coffee- and tea-making facilities.

For your dining pleasure

And hotel guests need not go far for great food. The Carmen's flagship restaurant, Babà Social Dining, is fast rising as one of Naga's favorite dining destinations. It is known for its hearty, daily breakfast buffet. A must-try for breakfast is Babà Social Dining's very own version of Naga's favorite noodle dish, Kinalas. Take it from Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat, who raves about it in this Facebook post.

Also a must-try are Babà Social Dining's international cuisine buffet (available every Sunday dinner), its 4-course Cuisine Naga special (available daily except Sunday dinner), and other notable à la carte offerings such as Crispy Pata Kare, Open-Face Chicken Cordon Blue, and Bulasing.



THE
Carmen
DOWNTOWN NAGA'S BOUTIQUE HOTEL

BABÀ
Social Dining