



Filipino-American Association of Central New Jersey Historical Timeline Perspectives

By Art Amaral

The Association was formed by people who knew each other as relatives, friends or co-workers. Some met one another at Church or were treated medically in a hospital or doctor's office. Formerly strangers, the "charter members" began to encounter each other at other functions, primarily baptismal parties or birthdays. Living in a "foreign country" with its pressures to melt away languages and cultures, they chose to support one another in strengthening their Christian values and maintaining the traditions and practices common to Filipinos. Pride as a people was principal in all deliberations. Networking among Filipinos was considered of utmost importance if the individual was not only to survive but to succeed in their profession. There arose a determination to use their talents, time and treasure to improve the community and country in which they lived so that they could say at one and the same time, "Tunay na Pilipino kami" (We are truly Filipino) and "We are patriotic Americans".

In the beginning "the charter members" were a relatively small local group of families in Mercer County, living principally in the townships of Ewing, Hamilton, Lawrence, West Windsor/Plainsboro, Princeton, Pennington and Hopewell. They desired to build a community of fellowship, service and support. Most of them were professionals with a strong concentration of people working in the medical field as Doctors and Nurses. Surprise! Surprise! This is hardly strange, since the Philippines is noted for its educated citizenry, especially in the field of nursing, engineering and medicine. There has always been a "brain drain" of people from the Philippines who have enriched and improved the various countries to which they have immigrated, in particular, the United States.

AUGUST 1983 – CHRISTMAS 1986

The FAACNJ had its beginnings at a picnic. A "small" gathering of friends were invited to the home of Dr. Wilfredo Causing and his wife Lynn. The preparations were magnificent for such a "small affair". Never have I attended such a picnic where not one, but two "litson" (roast pig) were the main course of the meal. Whatever happened to hotdogs and hamburgers? This was a Filipino picnic. Dr. Causing had photos taken during this picnic. For over an hour, I scanned the slide show of those "ancient" photos on my computer. Oh, how young we were then! The picnic was supposed to be held outside, on the beautiful grounds of Dr.

Causing's house. However, rain was in the forecast and so it showered on an off all afternoon with some breaks later in the day. The picnic food was set out on long tables in the three car garage of the house. The "litson" (roast pig) occupied the head table with various Filipino dishes crowding the space of the other tables. There was so much food and "talagang napakasarap" (truly delicious). There must have been close to 100 people in attendance, including the many children who scampered in and out of the house all day long. Everyone felt so much at home. The adult attendees (friends all) gathered in small groups chatting away, telling stories, laughing and planning for the future. The children continued their rounds of playing and running that all culminated in the event they had been waiting for all afternoon. The sky had cleared a bit, with the sun drying up the light rain of early afternoon. There outside the garage, in the spacious parking area, dominated by a basketball hoop, was a large, rectangular web of candy, locked within small plastic bags that hung from a decorated wooden trellis, festooned with balloons, suspended from the basketball hoop with a rope. The object of the game was to gather the children beneath the hoop and lower the web of candy for them to grab. The small children were let into the circle first, then after their turn, the older children...including some adults, I must admit. The wrapped candy was all over the place. Everyone was able to get some. How happy the children looked. What a great picnic.

At this first picnic, the organization of the Association was set into motion. Dr. Causing suggested a date for the first formal meeting and extended an invitation to any adult member who would be interested in planning for the next event, the family Christmas party. We would be celebrating our first Christmas as an unofficial "Association" at the banquet hall of the Nottingham Fire House in Hamilton. This "first administration" of the Association consisted of the following Members of the Executive Committee, namely:

*Dr. Fred Causing & Lynn Causing - Chairpersons
Mr. & Mrs. Edwin and Jane De Hart,
Mr. & Mrs. Arthur & Maria Amaral,
Mr. & Mrs. Joel and Ligaya Simpkins,
Mr. & Mrs. Manolo and Glenda Capili,
Dr. Belen Flores,
Dr. Cristeta Laurente,
Mrs. Enya Montenegro,
Mrs. Eleanor Valenzuela,
Mrs. Florodelis Blanquera,
Mr. Cesar Molina.
Mrs. Ched Anselmo,
Dr. Raquel Abaray,
Mr. Reynaldo Obed*

The firehouse was only decorated with a large Christmas tree in one of the corners to indicate the time and season. But what made this a truly Filipino Christmas event were the large "paroles" that hung from the ceilings of the hall. There were children everywhere, running about and asking excitedly when Santa would be coming with his gifts. There were games for the children and even a tall, lanky clown who performed juggling tricks. The meal was partly catered with generous contributions

of dessert from the membership. The adults enjoyed the evening of table hopping with one eye alert to the activities of their children.

Finally, the highlight of the evening arrived with the introduction by the MC that Santa Claus was in the hall. The children all gathered in a swarm around the place of the gift-giving. Impatiently, they waited to hear their name called out so that they could rush ahead to the man in red and receive their gift.

1986 – Chairperson: Dr. Fred Causing

*Secretaries: Jane De Hart, Ligaya Simpkins, Cesar Molina
Treasurer: Glenda Capili*

The next three years, 1984, 1985 and 1986 were formation years, during which the "charter members" planned and organized the two yearly events and set about to finalize the Constitution and By-Laws of the Filipino-American Association of Central New Jersey. Finally on July 27, 1986 in the Township of Princeton, New Jersey, the Constitutions and By-Laws of the Filipino-American Association of Central New Jersey were prepared for filing under the signatures of the following Charter Members: Dr. Romeo Laurente, Arthur Amaral, Dr. Zenaida V. Mangonon, Reynaldo Obed and Ligaya M. Simpkins.

Our picnics were now being held at Rosedale Park in Hopewell and our Christmas celebrations at the Nottingham Fire House in Hamilton. Finally, under the astute and paternal leadership of Dr. Fred Causing, we nominated and elected our first President of FAACNJ , Dr. Honesto Poblete.

1987-1988 - Dr. Honesto Poblete - President

*Vice President: Cesar Molina
Secretary: Teresa Menesis
Asst. Secretary: Florodelis Blanquera
Treasurer: Ched Anselmo
Asst. Treasurer: Apolinario Molina*

1989-1990 - Dr. Magdalena Jurado - President

*Vice Presidents: Edwin De Hart, Linda Molina
Secretary: Enya Montenegro
Asst. Secretary: Connie Paraan
Treasurer: Eduardo Espiritu
Asst. Treasurer: Felix Almanzor, Jr.*

There are six purposes and objectives under Article II, of the FAACNJ Constitution and By-Laws. The first one reads: To promote the cultural heritage and the traditions of the Filipino people. This objective was amply fulfilled by the wonderful presentations of Philippine folk dances and music during the administrations of Dr. Poblete and Dra. Jurado. In 1988, under the tutelage of Mrs. Helen Almanzor, the children of the Association performed dances as "Little Hula Flirt" and songs by the "Maya" choral group for the delight of all. In 1990, the Mutya Dance Company from Long Island performed skillfully the Mazurka, Singkil, Tinikling, and Pandango sa Ilaw.

1991-1992 - Ched Anselmo - President

*Vice Presidents: Felix Almanzor Jr., Arthur Amaral,
Eduardo Espiritu, Enya Montenegro
Secretary: Connie Paraan
Asst. Secretary: Josephine Johnson
Treasurer: Eleanor Valenzuela*

1993–1994 - Mr. Felix Almanzor Jr. - President

*Vice Presidents: Enya Montenegro, Elsa Anteola
Secretary: Linda Molina
Treasurer: Eleanor Valenzuela*

As the years passed, we all got older as did our children. We left behind the halls of the fire houses and moved into the banquet rooms of various hotels where the theme of the affair went from Christmas party to Christmas Ball. This event had become an adult affair – a time away from our children for a chance to satisfy our own social needs. The change, of course, affected the planning for such an affair. Planning became more complex and the expense was markedly increased. Previously, the Association asked each family for a membership fee to cover the expenses of the two events each year. This membership fee never worked. We had much more success charging for each event, and setting up a process of raising funds for our various charities by publishing a souvenir booklet with paid ads. I cannot stress how important the generous contributions of those nameless members were to the success of all these events over the many years. Their beneficent charity benefitted countless other members who were able to be included in such magnificent and festive events.

1995-1996 - Dr. Eduardo Flores - President

*Vice Presidents: Antonio Bayot, Manolo Capili, P.E.
Ruben Santos, P.E.
Secretary: Elo Obleada
Asst. Secretary: Zeny McNear
Treasurer: Sid Paraan*

1997-1998 - Dr. Carlos Soriano - President

*Vice Presidents: Robert Fernandez,
Edgardo Manalo, Wilfredo Sia
Secretary: Nancy Regulski,
Asst. Secretary: Fe Cruz
Treasurers: Maria Luzzi, Celeste Philips*

The venue for the annual picnic changed from Rosedale Park in Hopewell to the picnic area at the newly refurbished Mercer County Park. Wide open spaces, beautiful vista, and hiking trails along the lake made this place an instant favorite. No longer did the families have to take turns tending the fires of the barbecue grill and cooking the food for the growing numbers of attendants. The food was prepared by a Filipino caterer and we, the members, were free to roam around the spacious grounds of the park and enjoy the clean freshness of the air and the warmth of the sun.

In 1996, the Christmas Ball was held at the South Brunswick Marion Inn. The affair was labeled as "Elegant". Unlike

previous events, there were no "walk-ins" allowed to this event. Everyone must be pre-paid and pre-registered in order to attend. This was the restriction placed upon the Association by the hotel. And the "restriction" was a good one. For the first time we didn't need to worry about how many would show up at the Ball. The affair was very well attended and the evening certainly held an "elegance" not seen at any other. The theme of the evening was "Pagkakaisa at Pakikisama" (Unity & Friendship). This is certainly a theme that is the hallmark of all our events.

1999-2000 - Dr.Romulo C. Tengco - President

Vice Presidents: Bob Calingo, Rudy Paguio, Virgilio Tuazon

Secretaries: Cynthia Campbell, Stan Dela Paz

Treasurers: Dr. Aurelia Youngken,

Legal Advisor: E. Michael Angulo, Esq

2001-2002 - Dr. Ramon Bobila - President

Vice Presidents: Jean Brunone,

Evelyn Calingo, J. Matthew Esteban, PhD

Secretaries: Fe Elevado-Chenet, Faith Vergara, Charity Teves

Treasurers: Judy Ann C. Belli, Aurelia C. Samson

Legal Advisor: E. Michael Angulo, Esq

The FAACNJ had grown not only in the number of members but also in prestige. At the 1999 Christmas Ball, the Guest of Honor was none other than His Excellency, Ernesto M. Maceda, Philippine Ambassador to the United States who gave a wonderful inspiring talk about the contributions that Filipinos were making to this country. In the following year, the Ball was held at the Marriott Forrestal Village Hotel. "Pasko sa Nayon" (Christmas in the Country) was the theme and the attendees were all dressed in Filipino attire: Barong Tagalogs, Maria Claras, Kimonas and Ternos. The "Fourmost Quartet" serenaded the members with Filipino melodies and familiar songs. The Christmas tree was festooned with special Filipino Christmas tree ornaments. As usual, the Association, through the auspices of the current administration awarded scholarship grants to selected students from among the membership and donated medical supplies to the Philippine Medical Women's Association, one of many charitable projects.

The picnic of 2001 was held at the Princeton Picnic Park in West Windsor, adjacent to the Princeton Golf and Country Club. This park has been the venue for all our picnics for the last ten years. The Christmas Ball was held at the Princeton Hyatt Regency Hotel. This was the first time that the Association used this hotel's ballroom for the Christmas festivities. This hotel has been the choice of the Association for the past ten years and will also be the site for the Christmas Ball 2011, celebrating the 25th anniversary of the FAACNJ. The Ball of 2001 was memorable for the song renditions of our guest performer, Ms. Gloria Papin and the invigorating style of the guest MC, Ms. Grace Rustia, of news, TV, and radio fame.

2003-2004 - Dr. Ruben T. Ong - President

Vice Presidents: Beth Mil, Leslie Leynes-Smith

Secretaries: Gina Banzon, Frances Manila

Treasurers: Pam Robles, Susan de la Pena

Communications Directors: Romy Buerano, Ben Patena

Legal Advisor: Christina Almanzor-Laurente, Esq

2005-2006 - Mrs. Melisa Lopez-Weiner - President

Vice Presidents: Dolores Navata, Ginalyn Diaz

Secretaries: Stephanie Caduhada, Anna Lisa Lopez

Treasurers: Crisanto Estellado, Nida Relevante, Cora Terrado

Communication Directors: Florence Bondoc, Nini Donato

As in past administrations, the projects of the last four years focused on continuing the scholarship grants and the youth talent awards. There was participation at the local missions of the Trenton Soup Kitchen and Home Front. The Christmas festivities at the Princeton Hyatt Regency again took the Filipino theme of "Fiesta sa Nayon". An authentic "bahay kubo" was constructed in the reception area of the Ballroom. . Authentic Filipino cuisine was prepared for the evening's meal including favorite desserts such as, puto bumbong, palitaw, kutsinta, bibingka, puto at dinuguan. The members were encouraged to bring along their children to join in the festivities. The children were taught traditional Filipino games and participated in the "pabatin" and "piñata". Tables were also set up for face painting. The adults were not left out. Everyone danced the night away to the sounds of the "Music Boulevard Show Band". The adult line-dancing was all the rage.

Sadness and loss, at times, enters into everyone's life. It is the same with any association of people who truly care for one another. During 2003 - 2004, our Association suffered the tragic loss of two active members, Michell Rivera-Nyce and Maria Christina Almanzon-Laurente, Esq., the Association's legal advisor. The response of the FAACNJ members and friends of the community was impressive. Their moral support, condolences and generous monetary contributions were greatly appreciated. We gave a special thanks to our Honorable Consul General, Cecilia G. Rebong for sending a thousand dollar check for the benefit of the Rivera family to expedite Michelle's burial in her native town in Bataan. The officers and members of the Association mourned with the family of our beloved legal adviser, Christina. The tradition of "Bayanihan" was alive and well within the FAACNJ. We must never fail to remember in our thoughts and prayers all those members, our friends and companions in life, who have passed on".

2007-2008 Gerald Gutierrez, President – (Resigned)

2008 Vice President (Assumed as President): Ms. Hilisa Esteban

Vice Presidents: Anna Salapong, Gervie Mabutas

Secretary: Joann Caintic

Treasurer: Lester Donato

Communication Director: Rodolfo Manalili

Legal Advisor: Dennis Ortiguera, Esq.

2009-2010 ... Mr. Samuel June B. Mil - President

Vice Presidents: Romy Buerano, Bebsie Paguio,

Dino Landingin Jr.

Secretaries: Jane de la Cruz, Aurora Campbell

Treasurers: Frances Manila, Larissa Soos

Marketing Business Msg.: Frank Manalo

Event Coordinator: Josie Lagunilla, Jean Larini

Culture & Membership: Leleth Delandinde, Rosanna Manlapig

Legal Advisor: Dennis J. Ortiguera, Esq.

An energetic group of male and female Filipino nurses who were serving together at the hospitals of Mercer and Middlesex Counties volunteered as a group to serve as FAACNJ Officers for the years 2007 and 2008. They found in our Association an opportunity to express themselves as Filipinos and to further the aims of their vocational dedication in life, namely, to promote health and well-being among their "kababayans" (countrymen).

At the Christmas Ball of 2008, the guest speaker was Ms. Marsha Browne, an active member of the Executive Board of the "Friends of Alouette, International". She spoke to the assembled members about the great work of funding education to 300 children in the metro Manila, Abra and the Mountain Provinces, as well as providing shelter for abused girls in Palawan. Several members of FAACNJ were also active within the Organization.

There was a new component to the regular picnic program festivities in 2009 and 2010. A health fair was added as a unique opportunity to partner with vendors/sponsors to provide the members of the Fil-Am community valuable health information and to promote healthy living throughout our community.

The Christmas Balls of 2009 and 2010 titled themselves, "A Cultural Heritage Celebration, Unity, Charity and Fellowship Event." And so they were. Both events highlighted a new addition to the Program, namely, the "Humanitarian and Lifetime Achievement Award". The first Honoree for this award was none other than Dr. Fred Causing, the "founder" of FAACNJ. And in 2010, the Honoree of the "Humanitarian and Lifetime Achievement Award" went to Dr. Honestio Poblete, the first elected President of FAACNJ. Both men, however, have distinguished themselves honorably in their professions as well as in their communities. We have all benefitted greatly by the participation of these two eminent men in our Association.

Charity and compassion has always been a hallmark of the Filipino character. This was shown in the Association's response to disaster and misfortune during 2009. There were donations to local fire victims consisting of financial aid, clothing, school supplies and toys to one family. And then there was the wonderful response of the membership to the Filipino victims in Northern and Central Luzon from the disaster of Typhoon "Ondoy". There was member participation and donations to the American Heart Walk. And the "Friends of Alouette, International" received part of the proceeds from the Holiday Ball Souvenir program. The almsgiving continued throughout 2010.

For the first time in the history of FAACNJ, members participated in the 2010 Philippine Independence Day Parade in New York City. The parade and festivities were organized by the Philippine Consulate General in New York and the Philippine Independence Day Committee. This parade celebration is the largest in the United States.

It would be remiss if we failed to mention the time and energy that was spent by those legions of volunteers who formed the backbone of each administration. They, together with their

President of the year, took great pains to get the planning right so that everyone participating at the Summer Picnic and Christmas Ball really had a good time. We could all eat far better at our favorite restaurant. We could all enjoy the glitter and glamour of Las Vegas or Atlantic City and bask in all the pleasures they have to offer us. But none of those activities could strengthen our sense of belonging to a caring community of people who truly support one another.

Our love, compassion, friendship and concern for one another have long transcended the boundaries of Mercer County. The thousands of people whom we have helped through our charities, both individually and as an Association have expanded throughout the world. Love is expansive.

Love never draws into itself but of necessity has to extend outward. The Filipino-American Association of Central New Jersey will succeed in realizing the "Purposes and Objectives" for which it was founded as long as it looks outward and seeks those "charitable endeavors" that will benefit the most disadvantaged among us.

2011-2012 - Romy C Buerano - President

Vice President for Finance & Fund Raising: Dino Landinin

Vice President for Planning & Development:

Marissa De Guzman

Vice President for Cultural, Membership & Youth Affairs:

Josephine Johnson

Secretary: Suzette Rysz

Treasurer: Fe Concepcion, Remedios Qua

Webmaster: Fred Rysz

Legal Advisor: Dennis J. Ortiguera, Esq.

The future is now!

*Our sincere thanks for
putting together the FAACNJ History
to*

Arthur Amaral



*Author, writer, charter member,
and signatory to
the FAACNJ Constitution and Bylaws*