

Written by Tom Seyer

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The Cebuano-Filipino event that is the Sinulog Festival can become the biggest ethnic happening in the City of Los Angeles in the month of January if a 14-year program is pushed through successfully by the Cebu Brotherhood, Inc. (CBI) and the Filipino-American community of Southern California.

Starting with this year's 78th edition of the Sinulog Festival-Los Angeles on Sunday, January 13th, the event will become more-than a religious fiesta. It will become a celebration also of Philippine history and the positive Hispanic contributions to the making of the Filipino heritage. And the plan is to make it the first event to mark the four-year celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Spanish expedition led by Fernando de Magallanes (Ferdinand Magellan) from 2019 to 2022. After all, Magallanes-led explorers brought with them the original Santo Niño icon to Cebu. The Sinulog Festival-Los Angeles can start the commemoration of the Magallanes-led voyage every second Sunday of the New Year from 2019 to 2022. The celebration will mark also the progress of the Filipino people for the past 500 years.

The plan calls for the Sinulog Festival to have its usual 11:30 a.m. mass at the St. Columban Filipino Parish in the Historic Filipinotown district of Los Angeles. Then the fiesta portion moves on to a non-religious venue.

The Magallanes-led expedition landed also in Guam and, therefore, the United States is part of the historical event of this century. The Sinulog Festival-Los Angeles will also present the positive contributions of Filipinos to the American society. Bobby Reyes has registered the domain name www.magellan2021.com that is now linked to the "Bai (Cebu-Magellan)" section of the www.mabuhayradio.com. Both web sites will eventually carry the updates of the preparations for the celebration of the coming historical event.

The Cebuano settlers in Los Angeles continued to do the Sinulog Festival as a tradition.

Carlos and Lina Alpuerto have chaired the CBI's Sinulog Festival in Los Angeles for the past 19 years. They are again overall chairpersons of this year's edition. The Alpuertos agreed with the plan of Bobby Reyes, their co-chair, to have the fiesta part of the festival celebrated in a secular venue, the Social Hall of the Filipino-American Community of Los Angeles (FACLA). Ager Flores Libago, the CBI president, and Ms. Luz Espina, the chairperson of the CBI Board of

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Directors, approved also the Reyes plan. Mr. Libago and Ms. Espina are the honorary chairpersons of the 2008 Sinulog Festival committee.

To make the Sinulog Festival-Los Angeles bigger and better, the use of a venue like the FACLA Social Hall or the El Pueblo Los Angeles historical monument addresses the fact that not all people – whether they are Cebuanos, Filipinos, Hispanic or Americans – are Catholics. Reyes said also that Corporate America usually does not sponsor purely-religious community events. He has, however, persuaded Ms. Elizabeth Cariaga-Watermeier of the New York Life to support this year's Sinulog. Ms. Watermeier said that she would ask the New York Life company that she represents to become a long-term Sinulog Festival-Los Angeles corporate sponsor.

The Sinulog is now the Filipino equivalent of the world-famous Rio de Janeiro Festival and the New Orleans Mardi Gras.

The Sinulog Festival is celebrated on a Sunday closest to January 21st of every January in Cebu, the Queen City of the Southern Philippines. It has become one of the largest and most-colorful celebrations in the Philippines. It is now the Filipino equivalent of the world-famous Festival in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and Mardi Gras in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA. The festival is an annual event that honors the Santo Niño or the Child Jesus. The essence of the Sinulog Festival is the celebration of the Cebuano's (and the Filipino's) conversion to Christianity, if not the beginning of the Hispanic era in the Philippine archipelago.

In Los Angeles, California, settlers from Cebu started celebrating also on the third Sunday of January the Sinulog in 1930. It was the year when they began organizing an association that they called, Cebu Brotherhood. Sometime in 1947, the Sinulog venue was transferred to the St. Columban Filipino Parish, when it was established in a former fire station. When the jet age came in the 1960s, the Cebuanos in Southern California moved it to the second Sunday of January, so as to enable some of them to travel to Cebu City for the "real" Sinulog Festival.

The St. Columban Church in Loma Drive, Los Angeles, is the only Catholic parish in the United States that has "Filipino" as part of its name. One of its church bells was donated by the Antipolo parish in Rizal Province of the Philippines.

The following is the accepted history of the Sinulog, as contributed in part by the city

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government of Cebu, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinulog_festival#History .

Yes, the Sinulog Festival-Los Angeles can also be a tribute to the approximately 270 men who set out with Magellan in September 1519. Only 18 of them returned to Spain in September 1522. The motley crew who came from nearly 19 countries, the Philippines included, and this fact can make the Sinulog an international festival in Los Angeles, which is home to immigrants from more-than 120 countries and counting.

Should the 14-year plan of “reinventing” the Sinulog Festival succeeds, perhaps it can evolve into a Los Angeles version of the Mardi Gras and more. Starting this year, the CBI festival committee will display Philippine tourism posters, so that eventually the Sinulog Festival can also be a tourism expo for the Philippine and Los Angeles’ tourism industries. Reyes said that there is also a plan to organize a charter flight to Cebu City immediately after the 2009 Sinulog Festival in Los Angeles. The pilgrimage will permit Cebuano Americans and their friends to participate in the main Sinulog event in Cebu City the following Sunday. The Sinulog Festival-Los Angeles can thereby boost Philippine tourism as a downstream project. # # #

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