

Part VII of the Series, “Filipino Armageddon”

By Lolo Bobby Mercado-Reyes

{xtypo_quote} Our motto is ‘In Omnia Paratus,’ meaning ‘In All Things Prepared’ – James Featherstone {/xtypo_quote}

Thus said James G. Featherstone to a motley crowd of Filipino diplomats, Filipino-American community leaders and the working press. He is the general manager of the City of Los Angeles Emergency Management Department.

The Philippine Consulate General (PCG) invited Mr. Featherstone to an emergency-preparedness forum last Friday night, April 1, 2011, at its Rizal Hall.

April

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Consul General Mary Jo Bernardo Aragon welcomed the guest speaker and the participants in her opening remarks. She regretted, however, that she would have to leave early for another function. (While she did not mention the reason, this writer learned that she was to meet the newly-appointed Filipino ambassador to the United States

who was arriving that night at the Los Angeles International Airport on his way to Washington

DC

.) Ms.

Aragon

then turned over the microphone to Deputy Consul General Daniel R. Espiritu.

Editor’s Note: For Facebook members, to view the photos taken by Andy Edralin at the emergency-preparedness forum, please click on this link, <http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1975065540085&set=a.1975057659888.215466.1346479230#!/album.php?fbid=1975057659888&id=1346479230&aid=215466>

Getting Overseas-Filipino Volunteers Organized as “First Responders for Emergencies and Disasters (FRED)”

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Mr. Espiritu mentioned that the forum was scheduled ahead of the catastrophic earthquake that hit Northern Japan on March 11, 2011. He related that he met Mr. Featherstone and other emergency-management officials in a seminar about the need to improve the diplomatic corps' disaster-system planning and preparedness in a seminar sponsored by the United States State Department. The seminar was held a week before the said earthquake in Japan

. He said that the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) issued in 1995 a circular to all its diplomatic posts on the need for Filipino diplomats and their staff to undertake preparations to cope up with the effects of natural disasters and/or man-made emergencies. The bottom line for the DFA circular is to keep a Philippine diplomatic post operational after a major disaster that may strike the city where it is situated, so that it may be able to assist Filipinos and dual citizens that may need its help.

Meeting the Guest Speaker Before He Spoke

As the first portion of the forum was the serving of light dinner and refreshments, this writer took the opportunity to introduce himself to Mr. Featherstone and exchange business cards with him. I told him also that I would be sending to him the summary of a proposal to organize in the City of Los Angeles what this writer has tentatively called – for want of a better name – the “Filipino-American Volunteer (FAV) ‘First Responders for Emergencies and Disasters (FRED)’.”

This writer told Mr. Featherstone that he is currently doing a series of articles that calls for communities to prepare themselves for any disaster or emergency and get organized by assembling FRED volunteer teams. The FRED volunteers need to finish a disaster-system course and train continuously with the city firefighters and other disaster-response agencies. I told the guest speaker that an e-mail would be sent to him with a copy of it provided to District 13 Councilmember and concurrent City Council President Eric Garcetti, who knows personally

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this writer.

Yes, there is really the need and the urgency for individual families and their respective neighborhoods and communities-at-large to get themselves organized and trained to meet any eventuality, emergency or disaster.

Mr. Featherstone said that his office has prepared contingency plans for a 7.8-magnitude earthquake that may hit Los Angeles that might go for a duration of 55 seconds. The educated guesses are that there may be at least 1,800 deaths and 50,000 injured resulting from the incident. There may be some 300,000 houses and buildings destroyed, with 600,000 other facilities or edifices damaged. Two-thirds of all hospital beds would be rendered inoperable and unable to treat the injured. And the more-important reason for earthquake-preparedness programs is that people would probably be left on their own immediately after the quake, as there would be the disruption of power and other utilities and telecommunication services (including the cutting off of cell-phone service) probably for the next 72 hours.

The City of Los Angeles has 3,600 firefighter-paramedics in its payroll, aside from 10,000 police officers to service a population of 4.0-million and 2.0-million more workers and visitors during office or work hours.

Mr. Featherstone’s office conducts period drills, seminars and consultations with the so-called “partner agencies” such as other city, county, state and federal offices and with

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non-governmental organizations such as the American Red Cross. Readers that may want to know more about Mr. Featherstone’s office may visit its website at www.emergency.lacity.org .

The United States federal government maintains this website, www.ready.gov .

Comparing Metro Manila to Los Angeles

While the City of Los Angeles has a land area of 470 sq. miles, Metro Manila’s size is only 246.5 sq. miles. Living in Metro Manila are more-than 11.6-million people but its actual population – if the neighboring towns in Bulacan, Cavite, Laguna and Rizal are included – swells to more-than 20-million (as estimated in the 2007 published data).

One does not have to be rocket scientist or an expert like James Featherstone (and his 22 years of experience as a city firefighter) to realize that high-density areas like Metro Manila suffer more casualties than sprawling cities like Los Angeles in times of disaster and calamities.

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Using the Los Angeles standards in manpower, Metro Manila should have at least 18,000 firefighter-paramedics and 50,000 police officers. It is a public knowledge that the Philippines

cannot afford to hire on a ratio of 3,600 firefighter-paramedics and 10,000 police officers for every 4-million in population. And much more, Philippine government and its local-government units (LGUs) have few and mainly-obsolete fire-fighting equipment such as fire trucks. Even its premiere city of

Manila

does not operate any firefighting helicopter and much more the entire country does not have aircraft-tankers that can fly over a burning area and dump water on the blazing inferno. Water pressure also in Metro Manila is periodically low, if water is at all available even during normal times.

The Concept of the “FAV FRED”

It is suggested that starting in the City of Los Angeles – if not in the County of Los Angeles – Filipino-American volunteers (FAV) organize themselves into “FRED

” teams. After passing the requisite “disaster-system course” and getting trained by the proper city and/or county agencies, they start to turn their respective neighborhoods into “cultural zones of preparedness.” The objective is to help their kin and neighbors become survivors and not as helpless, if not defenseless, victims when the Big One comes or another natural calamity or even a man-made tragedy strikes.

As the “FAV FRED” becomes more organized, the proponents should raise funds from the Filipino-American community, American friends of the Philippines and American firms that want to tap the Filipino-American market (and its \$82-billion purchasing power per annum). The funds can then be used also to send “FAV Five” teams (composed

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naturally of five trained FREDs) to the Philippine homeland and start training Filipino neighborhoods to duplicate the family-centered, community-centered and office-centered disaster-preparedness programs being done in the City of Los Angeles, if not in the entire State of California.

The idea is to form in the Philippines local counterparts of the FRED teams of Los Angeles as a downstream project.

As the “FRED” ideas become works in progress, perhaps more funds could be raised to equip the both the Los Angeles- and Philippines-based FRED teams with state-of-the-art fire-fighting equipment and gear, including fire trucks and other vehicles that may be needed when calamities strike California and/or the Philippines.

The FAV FRED teams can be fielded to any calamity area in California, the United States, the Philippines

or any other country. Imagine if within 16 to 24 hours after a natural calamity hits for instance Metro Manila, a 747 jumbo jet loaded with 300 to 400 FAV FREDs lands in Manila (or at Clark or Subic airports, should the aircraft is unable to land in the airport in Manila). The FAV FRED

teams can then use the state-of-the-art equipment and vehicles that they have purchased earlier and sent ahead (prior to the happening of the calamity) to safe-and-secured depots in Metro Manila and/or the neighboring provinces.

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There are other components of the plans – from training expenses and allowances, honoraria, travel expenses and even additional insurance for the FAV – that have to be brainstormed, discussed and submitted for approval.

If the Filipino-American community in Southern California succeeds with the FAV FRED project, then perhaps the City of Los Angeles can organize other ethnic communities to follow suit and set up their own FRED teams.

Yes, it is easier said than done. But as Mr. Featherstone said in his presentation at the PCG last Friday night, people must use “imagination and initiative” in achieving a “culture of preparedness.” Yes, as in “In Omnia Paratus.” # # #

(To be continued . . .)

To view Part I, please click this link: [A 9.0-Magnitude Quake Will Destroy Metro Manila and Kill](#)

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[At Least 5.53-million Inhabitants Even Without a Tsunami Following It](#)

To read Part II, please go to: [How and Why a 9.0-magnitude Quake May Wipe Out Metro Manila and Cause 5.530-million Deaths](#)

Here is Part III: [Mother Nature Has Spared Metro Manila of Big Quake As It Has Been the Epicenter Only in 1658 and 1771](#)

Here's Part IV of the “Filipino Armageddon” series: [How Filipinos Can Mitigate the Unimaginable Damages that a “Mother of Natural Disasters” Will Cause](#)

Part V: [What If the Big One Hits Metro Manila and Its Dams Collapse as a Tsunami Rolls in from Manila Bay?](#)

Part VI: [How Overseas Filipinos Can Help their Kin Survive the Big One in Metro Manila or Anywhere in the Philippines](#)

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