

JGL Eye

By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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**The Bikol U.S.A. of the Midwest's May 13th Event in Chicago Heralds the 31st BNAA
Convention on July 15-17 in
Florida
, that Will Unite Bicolnon Americans**

CHICAGO (*jGLi*) – When Philippine's national hero Jose Rizal said, "Ang hindi magmahal sa sariling wika ay daig pa ang amoy ng mabahong isda," (those who do not love their language evinces a smell worse than a rotten fish), perhaps, it also applies to other native cultures and traditions.

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Perhaps, Dr. Rizal was meaning to say that one could absorb the cultures of others. But these newfound cultures should be supplementing, if not complimenting, and not rejecting his own.

To do otherwise is to disown his identity.

And in my small way of socializing among the Filipino community, I decided to join the Bikol (pronounced Be-Cool) U.S.A. in Chicago, Illinois, whose new board of directors decided to rename it into Bikol U.S.A. of the Midwest.

As a native of Donsol, Sorsogon, whose adjoining Bay has now become home to a big school of whale sharks locally known as *Butanding*, I thought becoming a member of a duly-registered, non-for-profit Bikol U.S.A. of the Midwest is the last thing that I would set out to do as a journalist in fairness to other social organizations. But Rizal's advocacy for Filipinos' love for their own language and culture made more sense to me and made me changed my mind. Sorsogon is one of the six provinces of Bikol region.

After all, becoming part of this group is an occasion to re-connect with my fellow Bikolanos. It becomes a way to pay something back to the community.

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As symbiotic relationship goes, this kind of involvement becomes more intense and more urgent when disasters strike in one's own native region. The recent earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crises in Japan left no doubt that sending help is the only option for people who want to let the Japanese people stand on their feet.

The Japanese crises may have eclipsed whatever disasters had hit the Philippines but they serve as warning to all of us that we should always be prepared for a rainy day.

And I believe joining organizations that extend disaster relief to one's region or any region is one way of lessening the pressure off the Red Cross or NGO's or the government.

DISASTER-PRONE REGION

As a disaster-prone region at the southeastern edge of Luzon Island, Bikol has its own share of misfortunes. The contiguous region abutted by its two island provinces of Catanduanes to the north and Masbate to the south never escapes the constant visits of destructive typhoons, eruptions of Mayon and Bulusan volcanoes and other calamities brought about also by man-made industries, like mining.

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The advantage of affiliating with region-inspired overseas organizations is apparent. You know who received your donation. In contrast with the Red Cross, other non-government organizations or the government, who make the ultimate decision in dispensing your donation for you, in volunteer social organizations, like Bikol U.S.A. of the Midwest, you are in control of your donation.

The Bikol U.S.A. in Chicago, Illinois started sometime in 1970s when Philippine Consul General Bienvenido M. Llaneta, a Bikolano, encouraged Chicago Bikolanos to organize an association called Ligawenos of Chicago headed by businessman Romy Badiola. Their objective was to unite for disaster relief for Bikolanos, according to Roger R. Odiamar, former president of Bikol U.S.A.

When Mayon Volcano erupted in 1984, there was a massive call for help from hundreds of residents around Mayon, who were displaced from their homes.

Zayda O. Baron, the first president of Bikol U.S.A. of Chicago went to Bikol and brought with her clothes, rice and other relief goods aboard two trucks and distributed them to the affected Bikolanos. Ms. Baron would later network with other Bikolanos in Michigan and New York for a need to form a single, cohesive group that would put Bikol organizations in the U.S. under one roof. This was later called Bikol National Associations of America (BNAA), installing Ms. Baron as its first president.

As a result of the eruptions, many Bikolanos in Albay were deprived of potable water supply. It also caused people to contract malaria. There was an urgent call for installation of pump wells in the area.

ERUPTIONS, TYPHOONS FREQUENT VISITORS

Because eruptions and typhoons alternated in bringing destructions to Bikol, there have been frantic calls for fund-raising every year after every BNAA convention that enabled it to construct 2,600 pump wells in the region from 1995 to 2010.

The pump wells were installed in remote areas beyond the reach of the government agency supplying drinking water (National Waterworks and Sewerage Authority). When Romulo Torres became president of Bikol U.S.A., he sought the help of then Senate President Frank Drilon, whose wife, Mila, is from Bikol, to install pump wells in the region out of his pork barrel, costing 1.5-Million pesos (US\$34,883.00).

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Aside from pump wells, BNAA was able to send to college 35 young and poor but bright students, graduating magna cum laudes and cum laudes. They now became nurses, engineers and other professionals.

The BNAA pays \$250.00 (10,750.00 pesos) tuition per student per year. This amount is raised to \$350.00 (15,050.00 pesos) a year if the scholar is pursuing nursing. Currently, BNAA has 29 scholars in various Bikol public universities.

BNAA also has also sponsored medical missions, among them, "Operation Smile" which operates on babies with cleft lip and palate (*bungi*).

BNAA has about 31 member organizations across the United States. It holds an annual convention. This year the 31st BNAA convention will be held from July 15-17 at the Hyatt Regency – Downtown Riverfront in Jacksonville

,
Florida
, hosted by the Bicol Association of Greater Jacksonville.

With the decision of the board of Bikol U.S.A. of the Midwest to re-affiliate with BNAA, following the appeal of Mr. Odiamar for the Board to reconsider its previous decision to break away from it this year, the incoming administration of President Evelyn Tolledo of Bikol U.S.A. of the

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Midwest is on course to revitalize its own scholarship and disaster-relief programs for the next two years. Ms. Tolledo's fellow executive officers and members of the Board are going to be inducted into office by Philippine Consul General of the Midwest

, Atty. Leo M. Herrera-Lim, on

Friday, May 13, 2011

at Four Points by Sheraton at 10249 Irving Park, Illinois (Tel. 773.946.9668). # # #

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