

Written by

Tuesday, 01 September 2009 21:16 - Last Updated Tuesday, 01 September 2009 21:42

The News UpFront: (TOP STORY) as of Tuesday, September 1, 2009

Oh, what a thousand dollars could buy! That amount accelerated Jose Rizal's downfall from revered Philippine national hero to an execrable fish-market security guard in San Diego ; his bust image stands a mute testimony to greed and official abuse, brought to America no less by the same person who now heads the NaFFAA. Though a septuagenarian, his skills at money-making are legendary, thus earning for him the sobriquet "Iagareng Hapon" (Japanese chainsaw) heaped by his most vociferous critic. It was descriptive of his ability -- like the saw -- to cut deals both ways. In one published statement, he denies making money, yet documents recently unraveled showed NaFFAA paid his own company at least \$1,000. That sounds like a pittance compared to the \$103,500 that an elderly couple pocketed from NaFFAA. Seven years after the fact, the NaFFAA has all the markings of a disemboweled "milking cow". Or is it a "ship" running aground?

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TALE OF A THOUSAND-DOLLAR LIE

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Is NaFFAA a Spent 'Milking Cow' or a 'Ship' Running Aground?

{xtypo_quote} . . . *When we tolerate what we know to be wrong; when we close our eyes and ears to the corrupt because we are too busy or too frightened; when we fail to speak up and speak out, then we strike a blow against freedom and decency and justice* . . .
. -- Robert F. Kennedy {/xtypo_quote}

By ROMEO P. MARQUEZ

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The author is a member, Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) and the Asian-American Journalists Association (AAJA)

S AN DIEGO – "Where is the outrage?" screams Ernesto Gange, a co-founder of the National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA), in a sudden outburst of emotion directed at Greg B. Macabenta, the current NaFFAA chair.

Mr. Gange wasn't being melodramatic when he uttered those words, rather, he was vocalizing years of frustration at seeing the rapid downslide of the organization he had also dreamed of becoming the singular voice for the estimated four-million Filipinos in America.

NaFFAA took off in 1997, buoyed by the collective aspirations of its founders that included Alex Esclamado and Gange himself, to unify the fractious socio-political, cultural and tribal associations in Filipino communities across the United States.

Mr. Gange, of Philadelphia, likens NaFFAA to a ship, its captain, Macabenta; on a voyage to bridge the vast oceans of differences and clashing interests in these American communities as

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unwieldy as the native homeland's 7,100 islands.

"The ship is taking too much water," he warns Macabenta, "and you alone have to make the decision to fix it and continue with the voyage, or abandon ship."

The metaphorical ship on Mr. Gange's mind is in reality crumbling from the weight of its own indifference to anything that doesn't belong. Management is run by a cabal of secretive and conniving foul-mouths who spew profanities at the slightest challenge to their rule.

Editor's Note: Bobby Reyes has called the NaFFAA the Filipino-American version of the SS Titanic. And, hence, the revised title of this article.

But even as the present situation may warrant cleansing, indications are that nobody wants to give it up completely. The ship's journey is quite unstable, necessitating a distress call from Macabenta to members to help him save it.

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The NaFFAA is under siege, from inside and out, battered by accusations of improprieties and allegations of wrongdoing.

Mr. Gange, the insider, asks Macabenta: "what would you expect from us NaFFAA members when we woke up one morning and found out that the \$450,000 NaFFAA fund had been stolen?"

Mr. Gange invites people to take a look at the huge expenses -- which he describes as "fabricated" --detailed in NaFFAA's audited financial report, namely: Consultant fees, \$155,228; Telephone Exp. \$33,624; Bookkeeping fees; \$51,530; Stipend, \$58,000; Contributions, \$18,697; Miscellaneous, \$32,394; Share to affiliates, \$12,347, Tags and labels, \$7,000, Lorna's (Dietz) candles, \$420, and many more".

An outsider, Bobby Reyes, in his usual pejorative style, writes: "I have called Mr. Macabenta and some of his fellow national executive officers (NEOs) of the NaFFAA as a 'bunch of crooks' (C-R-O-O-K-S) for several years now. I will not be surprised if they would not answer (you) but instead curse me with all the unprintable words there are in their vocabulary."

Gange's and Reyes' separate claims of improprieties are both confirmed and denied through an elaborate but nasty email exchanges with a slew of NaFFAA supporters that included the scumbag lawyer Rodel Rodis who was arrested in Northern California sometime ago for passing what was thought to be a bogus \$100 bill.

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Mr. Macabenta has unleashed his skunky ammunitions with a fury of a cornered animal. Out of his filthy mouth spews demeaning words and phrases like "stupid", "idiot", "scandal monger", and "scum".

NaFFAA national treasurer Ludy Corrales would not be outdone. She calls NaFFAA critics "bullsh_tters" and their legitimate queries "bullsh_t". When asked to name the "bullsh_tters", she just clammed up.

Ms. Corrales, who manages her own company in New Jersey, had loaned out money to the indicted Ben Menor, a community organizer in San Jose who had pleaded no contest to two charges against him in Superior Court.

Lorna Dietz, advertising solicitor for the Macabenta-owned *Filipinas* magazine and an "online coordinator", speaks so ignorantly with a forked tongue of a mother troll. She describes anyone with an issue with NaFFAA as a "troll".

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Ms. Dietz has ignited suspicion about her relationship with Macabenta after she mindlessly posted a closely-guarded bit of intelligence.

She writes in her classic "cease and desist" email: "If this (meaning, the \$300,000 money grant to NaFFAA by Wells Fargo) were true, then NaFFAA wouldn't have had any financial problems and neither would *Filipinas Magazine*."

Well, the donation was true. Wells Fargo Bank gave \$100,000 and Wells Fargo Foundation \$200,000. NaFFAA co-founder Alex Esclamado, to whom the checks were sent, made a pretty sum -- \$38,000 -- in securing the grant.

Did the money rescue NaFFAA from bankruptcy? Did it help *Filipinas* magazine from its financial problems as indicated by Ms. Dietz?

Lourdes M. Esclamado, wife of Alex Esclamado, was so vivid in distancing herself from the Wells Fargo money, saying she didn't know it existed. Yet, documents bared just a few days ago, showed she received \$18,000 in 2002 and \$27,500 in 2001.

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She and husband Alex Esclamado pocketed a total of one-hundred three-thousand five-hundred dollars (\$103,500) with his \$38,000 in 2002 and \$20,000 in 2001 given by NaFFAA from the Wells Fargo grant.

If Lourdes M. Esclamado is the wife of a NaFFAA co-founder and she doesn't know a thing about NaFFAA, what does it make of Lorna Dietz who is not Macabenta's wife but knows so much about NaFFAA like the \$300,000 grant that could have gone to rescue Macabenta's financially-ailing *Filipinas* magazine?

Who are we to believe? What kind of lies are they going to weave next?

The claims gained new currency as a ranking official in NaFFAA's region one in the East Coast, lawyer J.T. Mallonga, issued a call to create a board of inquiry for the sole purpose of gathering the facts related to widespread allegations of wrongdoing. The proposal had seemed destined to the trash bin and never got off the ground.

Mr. Macabenta has already declared himself clean. He says: "I never received \$300,000 from Wells Fargo Bank for or on behalf of NaFFAA at any time in NaFFAA's existence and my ad agency never received commissions from that alleged payment."

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The first part of that sentence may be correct that he "never received \$300,000 from Wells Fargo Bank for or on behalf of NaFFAA at any time in NaFFAA's existence".

In fact, says Wells Fargo Foundation president Tim Hanlon, the monies were secured by and paid to NaFFAA co-founder Alex Esclamado.

However, the second part of the same sentence that reads: "and my ad agency never received commissions from that alleged payment" sounds like a big lie.

{xtypo_quote} I am not trying to say that Mr. Macabenta and the other officers of NaFFAA are not guilty of any malfeasance or -- as some misinformed readers believe -- federal crime. --- Perry Diaz {/xtypo_quote}

A "commission" tagged as such may be non-existent. But at least \$1,000 was given to Macabenta's ad agency (Minority Media Services Inc) by the NaFFAA, according to a financial report released by Macabenta spokesperson Dr. Joy Bruce of Florida.

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Amidst the charges and counter-charges, Macabenta tries to project a sparkling-clean image of himself. Hints that he had a possible conflict of interest because (by his own admission he made money from Wells Fargo, a NaFFAA donor) of professional deals with Wells Fargo Bank had been quickly doused.

It fell flat, however, when one of his rabid fans named Perry Diaz, a bungling news distributor who packages himself as a "journalist" in Sacramento, adverted to Macabenta as being guilty of wrongdoing, if not of a federal crime.

"I am not trying to say that Mr. Macabenta and the other officers of NaFFAA are not guilty of any malfeasance or -- as some misinformed readers believe -- federal crime," volunteers Diaz, who is also known by his birth moniker Porfirio Diaz, a care-giver and real estate agent.

Who are we to contest Diaz's verdict? # # #

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This “Breaking News” was sent by Romeo P. Marquez, editor, Philippine Village Voice, San Diego, California. Mailing address: P.O. Box 2118, La Jolla, CA 92038.

PHILIPPINE VILLAGE VOICE - Redefining Community News
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Volume 3, Issue No. 21 / News Without Fear or Favor /

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