

Written by Romeo P. Marquez

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For an organization supposedly as big as the NaFFAA, silence in the past many months is deafening. Questions about its money-making and money-spending activities have been largely ignored. Now, a NaFFAA co-founder comes out with the revelation that it is in shambles. Senior officials have quit. The organization was driven out of its head office in Washington, DC because of rental problems. Even its non-functioning website is perpetually "being updated". Meanwhile, those whose hearts really bleed for the NaFFAA are passing the hat to keep it afloat. Where are the thousands upon thousands of dollars that it used to brag having? What has been done to address the issue that at least \$400,000 had been stolen?

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NaFFAA Stripped of Its Home in DC; Top Officials Resign as Organization Teeters

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By ROMEO P. MARQUEZ

Member, Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE)

and Asian-American Journalists Association (AAJA)

TORONTO, Canada - Just less than a year after a distress call was aired to officials of the National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA) by its chairman Greg Macabenta, the supposedly US-wide organization is now staggering to death, abandoned by its senior officials and stripped of its home, according to one of its founders.

The lone holdout seems to be only Macabenta himself, propped up by a skeleton crew who sometimes makes NaFFAA's presence felt via social media, mainly the internet. Even NaFFAA's official website is on the throes of extinction, being perpetually under a state of "being updated".

As it now appears, NaFFAA is ready to tumble. "Our problem in NaFFAA is very serious," says Ernesto "Apo" Gange, NaFFAA co-founder and the founding chair of International Network of Filipinos Overseas Inc. in Philadelphia, PA.

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"We lost our NaFFAA National Headquarters in Washington, DC. We lost . . . , " he bewails, and listed the names of officials who quit.

Apo Gange said NaFFAA's national executive officers he identified as Lourdes "Ludy" Corrales, national treasurer; Atty. Reuben Seguritan, legal counsel; Armando "Doy" Heredia, executive director and chief operating officer; and Leslie Talusan, secretary to the executive director; have already resigned their posts.

"NaFFAA runs on fumes," Ernie Gange stresses, quoting Macabenta's exact words. "We run out of gas," but "we will survive," he adds.

Mr. Gange has been scouting for what he calls "new players" to breathe life into the 13-year-old organization which he co-founded in 1997 with the now retired Alex Esclamado to unify Filipinos in America under one big umbrella organization.

"Life must go on, and together we will rebuild NaFFAA," he says in an email to this reporter.

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It wasn't immediately clear when NaFFAA was kicked out of Washington, DC, but it effectively ended its presence in the US capital, mainly to complement its lobbying efforts. Previously, Macabenta had complained about not being able to pay rent for the NaFFAA office on time.

NaFFAA's present destitute state was a far cry from its early years when newspaper publisher Alex Esclamado and businesswoman Loida Nicolas-Lewis headed it in succession. At that time, NaFFAA seemed to enjoy wide support within and outside the Filipino community.

It fell into disrepute soon after journalist Bobby Reyes of Los Angeles, California, began questioning in May 2000 its fund-raising activities and money-spending sprees. He also bewailed NaFFAA's arrogance, lack of transparency and accountability.

Reyes had sought office as a NaFFAA regional chair but was voted out in an election he claimed was rigged by NaFFAA officials who did not want him there. The incident has become known as "Ballygate" after the name of the hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada where it took place.

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{xtypo_quote} **Editor’s Notes:** To read about the Ballygate, the Menorgate and the NaFFAAGate, please click on this link, <http://www.mabuhayradio.com/sections/naffaagate.html>
{/xtypo_quote}

Huge sums of monies – estimated at between \$450,000 to \$1-million – are alleged to have been "stolen" from the organization through elaborate schemes by unnamed insiders. A proposal to create a fact-finding committee to investigate had been promptly nipped in the bud.

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Previously, NaFFAA was also linked to a celebrated case in San Jose, California involving a community organizer named Ben Menor who had been indicted for grand theft and pleaded no contest to other charges.

According to Gange, NaFFAA's national conference normally held in September has been moved to October this year. Sources said there's very little interest in the conference, especially at a time when NaFFAA is reeling under.

"We have to pass the hat," Gange says, to pay some people who worked at NaFFAA. He said former NaFFAA chair Loida Nicolas-Lewis had volunteered to pay \$20,000 out of \$40,000 debt NaFFAA owed its executive director, and paid another employee for half (what the) NaFFAA owed.

"We passed the hat and paid for the balance," he explained.

"Atty. Reuben Seguritan resigned, out of frustration, because, when he was asked for his opinion with what to do with the unexplained missing funds, estimated to about \$400K, before the attorney from New York could form a fact-finding commission, Ruben suggested for the

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manifesto. And, everything stopped," Gange stated.

NaFFAA has stonewalled on a number of questions posed by this reporter since last year.

"Regardless of what happened in the past, we owe it to ourselves to rebuild NaFFAA. We must nurture NaFFAA for the next generation of Filipinos, a vehicle to use, as their voice in America," Ernie Gange concluded.

{xtypo_quote} This Currents & Breaking News is posted online compliments of Romeo P. Marquez, editor, *Philippine Village Voice*, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Volume 4, Issue no.4, April 29, 2010
{/xtypo_quote}

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