

The News UpFront: (TOP STORY) as of Monday, August 17, 2009

Either the documents are fake or the top three officials of NaFFAA are blind or in perpetual denial. The Wells Fargo Bank coughed up a whopping three-hundred-thousand dollars and handed to NaFFAA as grant money. Now, as financial support dwindles and the federation struggles for survival, the money is nowhere to be found. NaFFAA Chair Greg Macabenta says he never received it. Treasurer National Treasurer Luly Esclamado denies its existence. Vice Chair Rozita Lee sticks out her neck for Macabenta, which is essentially parroting Macabenta's position. Despite all these, an anonymous source within NaFFAA leaked documents that were filed with the Internal Revenue Service clearly showing \$300,000 had been received, courtesy of Wells Fargo Bank. Are these three officials part of the "secret gang" that's bleeding NaFFAA to death?

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THE BIGGEST SCAM IN THE MAKING? WHERE'S THE MONEY?

Top NaFFAA Officials Deny Seeing the \$.3-M Grant from Wells Fargo Bank; Who's Lying?

Written by

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By ROMEO P. MARQUEZ

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S AN DIEGO - In what may turn out to be the biggest scam in the entire Filipino community in the United States, top officials of the National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA) contradicted claims that the organization had received over a quarter million dollars in grant money from Wells Fargo Bank.

The denials came even as the so-called "smoking gun" -- the document

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proving the money existed and had been turned over to NaFFAA -- surfaced during the weekend.

With proof being displayed before their eyes, NaFFAA's top three leaders continued to hang on precariously to their posts as calls for their resignations mounted, even repudiating the "smoking gun" that had been leaked by concerned individuals within the federation.

As they struggled with each passing day to contain the damage to the already-shaken federation, journalist Bobby Reyes disclosed that ranking officials of NaFFAA were poised to kick out the officials led by NaFFAA chair Greg Macabenta if only to save the organization.

For the third time in as many occasions, Macabenta again dissociated himself and his companies -- the advertising agency Minority Media Services Inc. and two publications (Filipinas magazine and Ang Panahon newspaper) -- from involvement with the \$300,000 that Wells Fargo Bank had given to NaFFAA.

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“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,” he said in an email to his NaFFAA colleagues.

An advertising solicitor who works for Macabenta, Lorna Dietz, who says she's NaFFAA's online coordinator, had hinted that the money or part of it, could have been used by Macabenta to provide financial muscle to one of his ailing publications, the Filipinas Magazine, which he recently acquired.

It was Dietz who suggested a link between the \$300,000 grant money and Macabenta's magazine.

"If this (meaning Macabenta had received the \$300,000 and got commissions) were true, then NaFFAA wouldn't have had any financial problems and neither would Filipinas Magazine," Dietz wrote in an email on Wednesday, August 12.

Further questions to Macabenta and Dietz were not answered.

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Macabenta's assurances were probably intended to calm down three of the most-outspoken NaFFAA regional officials, namely, Ernesto Gange of Philadelphia, Dr. Joy Bruce of Florida, and Ed Navarra of Michigan.

So disappointed was Gange, a co-founder of NaFFAA, with the present developments that he suggested to the top officials of the organization to jump off San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge.

Dr. Bruce on Wednesday (Aug. 12) told Macabenta pointblank:” I need to know if NaFFAA really got money from Wells Fargo, and if so, when was it given, how much did Wells Fargo give, who got that money for NaFFAA and did anybody get paid commission?”

Two days later on Friday (Aug. 14), Macabenta sent out an email asking his

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colleagues to demand evidence from Reyes, NaFFAA's unwavering critic who has been on the trail of NaFFAA wrongdoings in the last 10 years.

"Right now," Macabenta wrote, "Marquez (this reporter) and Reyes are even using my 'denials' as 'proof of guilt.' These idiots have no intention to listen to reason - but at the very least, reasonable people like you will".

Bobby Reyes said that "the Smoking Guns prove conclusively (and beyond reasonable doubt) the existence of a \$300,000 grant given by the Wells Fargo Bank to the NaFFAA in 2002 [as contained in the Form 990 the NaFFAA submitted to the Internal Revenue Service]."

Since the beginning Macabenta never answered questions directly. What he usually did was to make statements to friendly third parties, perhaps to evade more probing questions and save himself the humiliation of not being able to respond.

But Reyes insisted he had the "smoking gun" proving his allegation that "x x the Wells Fargo Foundation gave the NaFFAA \$300,000 in 2002. The

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grant was secured by Greg Macabenta, x x x whose company, the Minority Media, was paid commissions that were not reflected in the NaFFAA financial statement for 2002."

"(T)he Smoking Guns prove conclusively (and beyond reasonable doubt) the existence of a \$300,000 grant given by the Wells Fargo Bank to the NaFFAA in 2002 [as contained in the Form 990 the NaFFAA submitted to the Internal Revenue Service]", he explained.

This reporter had contacted Wells Fargo Bank for comment but as of this writing, bank officials have not responded yet.

Reyes' assertion appears to be corroborated by Ed Navarra, NaFFAA's regional chair in the Midwest and Dr. Joy Bruce, also a former NaFFAA chair in Florida.

Navarra stated: "I thought I saw a spreadsheet from Joy Bruce the other day stating that NaFFAA received a grant of \$300,000 from Wells Fargo. in 2002, where did that come from?"

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According to Reyes, his secret contacts within NaFFAA leaked the documents indicating that the deal "might have netted the scalawags more-than one-million greenbacks". He did not identify who the "scalawags" were.

Lourdes M. Esclamado, wife of NaFFAA co-founder Alex Esclamado and current assistant national treasurer, contradicted both Reyes and Navarra.

"There has never been a \$300.000 grant to NaFFAA. I know. I was there from the beginning," she stated.

NaFFAA's vice chair, Rozita V. Lee, said she was "sticking her neck out" for Macabenta.

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"If Wells Fargo provided a grant to NaFFAA of \$300,000 given during the beginning years of NaFFAA under it's first Chair, Alex Esclamado, surely the detractors can investigate and find out facts rather than make all kinds of insinuations about Greg regarding this grant," Lee said.

Reyes is standing his ground. He declared: "Mr. Macabenta, Mrs. Esclamado and Ms. Lee continue to deny it. They keep on maintaining their lies and their collective action is now indefensible in view of the leaked documents."

The claim and counter-claim have shifted attention from what appears like the impending collapse of NaFFAA owing to widespread lack of financial support from the public and its traditional corporate sponsors.

Macabenta lamented that some NaFFAA officials were beginning to show their doubts about him.

In an email, he wrote: "They (referring to Reyes and this writer) have simply responded with more accusations, hoping to erode your confidence and that

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of others in me and the organization. By the tenor of your email, it appears to be working on you." # # #

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Top NaFFAA Officers Continue to Deny \$300,000 Grant Even if “Smoking Gun” Proving It Is Found - Mab

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