

Written by Romeo P. Marquez

Tuesday, 27 May 2008 05:35 - Last Updated Tuesday, 27 May 2008 05:49

The News UpFront: (TOP STORY) as of Tuesday, May 27, 2008

What could have been a defining moment in the Filipino community turned into a festivity for the young and old, a joyous celebration indeed that was not much different from others held in the name of unity. When the event unfolded on Saturday, May 24, at National City's Kimball Park, it became clear that the Gawad Kalinga project to eradicate poverty was being hyped up preparatory to a summit meeting in San Diego.

'ONE' MOVEMENT'S FILIPINO CELEBRATION

A Caravan, an Outdoor Entertainment, Filipino Food and a Call for Unity

By Romeo P. Marquez

The author is a member of the Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE), the Asian-American Journalists Association (AAJA) and the National Press Club of the Philippines-USA.

Proponents of an ongoing social revolution in the Philippines rallied Filipino Americans here to "rise above (our) differences" and unite as one people and one nation in two parallel events on Saturday (May 24) that fell short of expectations because of what some officials said was the fickle weather.

“Call for Unity” Event on Saturday Falls Short of Expectations Due to “Fickle Weather” - MabuhayRadio

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Dark clouds had covered most of San Diego County two days before and, uncharacteristic of a warm spring sliding into a hot summer, rain fell overnight Friday, dousing the region and threatening the staging of ONE Movement's call for unity.

Organizers had billed it as "a Filipino celebration" and "a gathering of heroes" and literally took to the streets in a caravan of about 25 cars that ended later in National City's Kimball Park which, for the first time, was fenced in to control the flow of people.

The caravan was to have started earlier from three points. Instead, it assembled in just one, at a parking lot of the Plaza Bonita shopping mall in the South Bay, from where it rolled at least half an hour late onto a local freeway a portion of which is named Filipino-American Highway.

PHILIPPINE VILLAGE VOICE - Redefining Community News

BREAKING NEWS - Exclusive

Volume 2, Issue No. 13 / News Without Fear or Favor /

. A community service of San Diego's Philippine Village Voice (PhilVoiceNews@aol.com or at 619.265.0611) for the information and better understanding of the public.

For a 'unity' gathering, this wasn't very welcoming," a senior couple said, referring to the steel wire fence that enclosed part of the 27-acre park near the amphitheatre facing the intersecting streets on 12th and D Avenue.

Earlier reports that gang members might disrupt the special guest performance of a group had not been confirmed. One official, however, explained that the fence was a last-minute decision to regulate traffic.

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Either way, police presence by foot and mobile cars was highly visible, which was unusual given that the National City police headquarters was just a spit away.

Attendees to the outdoor event were mostly the young, second-generation Filipino Americans who reveled in music while the older folks stayed comfortably indoors enjoying food, the company of friends and the presence of top officials of government and private organizations.

Even if the twin events were joined, the number of people present would hardly fit the projected "thousands of Filipino Americans from across the country" enjoined to celebrate "the Filipino dream for unity, for solidarity, for honor".

As the day's program unfolded, it became clear that "ONE, a Filipino celebration" was all about *Gawad Kalinga*, a project launched in the Philippines in 2003 and aimed at eradicating poverty through community self-help. GK has spread to Asia and some parts of the world, according to officials.

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Guest performers played to a sparse crowd of kids and young adults in the muddy and wet park while at the adjoining Martin Luther King Community Center officials, patrons, supporters and believers were singing praises to *Gawad Kalinga* and its officials and how the project was transforming people and communities in the Philippines.

National City Mayor Ron Morrison welcomes the participants to what he has described as the "Unofficial Capital of the Philippines in the United States," the city being home to the largest percentage of Filipinos in a city population. National City has a population of 60,000 and 20-percent of it is Filipino.

GK targets to build 700,000 homes in 7,000 communities by 2010, its seventh year. *GK* executive director Tony Meloto said he was hoping the Philippines would rise from poverty by the year 2024 with the new generation of Filipinos.

"We were designed for greatness," Meloto told the indoor crowd over lunch of pancit, lumpia and adobo. "We're not designed for poverty," he said, explaining his presence as an expression of pride in being Filipino.

Businessman Tony Olaes talked about the need "to unify once and for all" and shared his experience growing up in a San Diego neighborhood called Shelltown.

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"It's time to level the playing field," he exhorted, citing the lack of opportunities in the Philippines.

National City Mayor Ron Morrison welcomed the participants to what he has repeatedly stated as the "Unofficial Capital of the Philippines in the United States," the city being home to the largest concentration of Filipinos at a little over 20 percent of its 60,000 population.

"Today, we were united by pancit, lumpia and adobo," he joked to the delight of the audience, some of them *GK* volunteers coming from as far as the East Coast.

In the meantime, the youth, the second-generation Filipinos being targeted to solidify the community, were having fun listening and dancing to the latest rave music, out there in the cold pretty much left to themselves. # # #

(Editor's Note: This Breaking News is sent by Romeo P. Marquez, Editor, Philippine Village Voice, San Diego, California. Mr. Marquez's ailing address: P.O. Box 2118, La Jolla, CA. 92038).

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