

## Four Fil-Am Organizations Vie for Community Support - MabuhayRadio

Written by Romeo P. Marquez

Tuesday, 20 May 2008 15:08 - Last Updated Tuesday, 20 May 2008 15:26

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A US-born businessman, vowing to reclaim his "Filipino-ness," shoulders the costs of an event he hopes would jump-start the quixotic quest for unity. Meanwhile, three competing organizations are jointly harnessing their supporters and influence in pursuit of the same elusive goal. "Unity" seems to be the new buzzword in the community long beset by factional strife and personal animosities. In an ironic twist, however, none of the organizations would play second fiddle to the other.

### FILIPINO 'UNITY' CELEBRATIONS

#### Four Organizations Vie for Community Support

By ROMEO P. MARQUEZ

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

A free-and-open event that organizers envisioned would be a first step in unifying the quarrelsome Filipino community takes place on Saturday, May 24, amidst frantic preparations to hold a similar affair two weeks later.

The first, under the aegis of the newly-formed San Diego Community Development Institute, celebrates what it calls "ONE, the Filipino dream for unity, solidarity and honor" in day-long activities at the Kimball Park in National City.

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The second, by the combined forces of Aguinaldo Foundation, the Council of Philippine American Organizations (COPAO), and Mabuhay Alliance, is an annual hoopla on June 7 commemorating Philippine independence from Spain.

ONE's choice of National City is symbolic and conforms with its universal goal, the suburban enclave south of San Diego having the largest, percentage-wise, concentration of Filipinos who make up almost a fifth of its 55,000 population.

In a touch of irony again, National City is the home base of COPAO. A Filipino-American, Fidelis Ungab, sits as councilman in the city government.

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The community's umbrella organization moved out the staging of its annual event to its neighbor to the north, at San Diego City's Mira Mesa community, in what could be an attempt to reverse the decline in the number of attendees with fresh infusion of moral support from

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Aguinaldo Foundation and the networking, largely-shell agency Mabuhay Alliance.

While the former showcases what's supposedly "the best of our roots, the finest of our culture" through performances by acclaimed artists, the latter accentuates the Filipino struggle in the US for social and political recognition in a slew of festivals that in the past accompanied such feasts.

Event organizers foresee a turnout in the "thousands" although it is difficult to say whether people would attend because of the free entertainment (and free food at ONE's) or because of the event itself.

ONE's chief attraction is the special guest presence of Tony Meloto of Gawad Kalinga fame and Danny Javier of the singing group APO Hiking Society. In addition, ONE also features entertainment by local talents, a bike ride and a caravan along a segment of a local freeway called Filipino-American highway.

Filipino businessman Tony Olaes is shouldering the costs of the ONE event, in keeping with his vision to "get people to believe in something".

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"It's a stepping stone," he says in an interview, "a reason for getting people involved".

Mr. Olaes, who declares "I don't want to be part of the gossipy Filipinos" whose presence is all over community organizations, spearheads ONE which he believes would start off the unity process and end petty quarrels and personal animosities prevalent in many groups.

He explained that the reason for putting up the San Diego Community Development Institute was to give people a structure to come to terms with their community. "No matter how they are disliked, it doesn't matter to me," he stresses.

"Our biggest asset (in the United States) is our number," Mr. Olaes emphasizes.

The joint Philippine Festival and Faire on June 7 at the Mira Mesa Community Park is a big fund-raiser for one of the sponsors, COPAO, which was recently slapped with a substantial cut of its grant from the County Board of Supervisors following the disappearance of \$27,000 from its coffers.

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This rebuff has somehow robbed on COPAO's once-pristine reputation. Other outstanding issues in the organization served to curb popular enthusiasm for its events, thus the drop in attendance.

"An opening ceremony at 10:45 a.m. will be followed by non-stop entertainment and cultural presentations," said an announcement from organizers.

This year's theme is "Community Through Unity".

"The collaboration between (sic) three of the largest associations in San Diego County is a bold step toward unifying our often fractious community," the announcement further said. # # #

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