

# HAWAII FILIPINO CHRONICLE

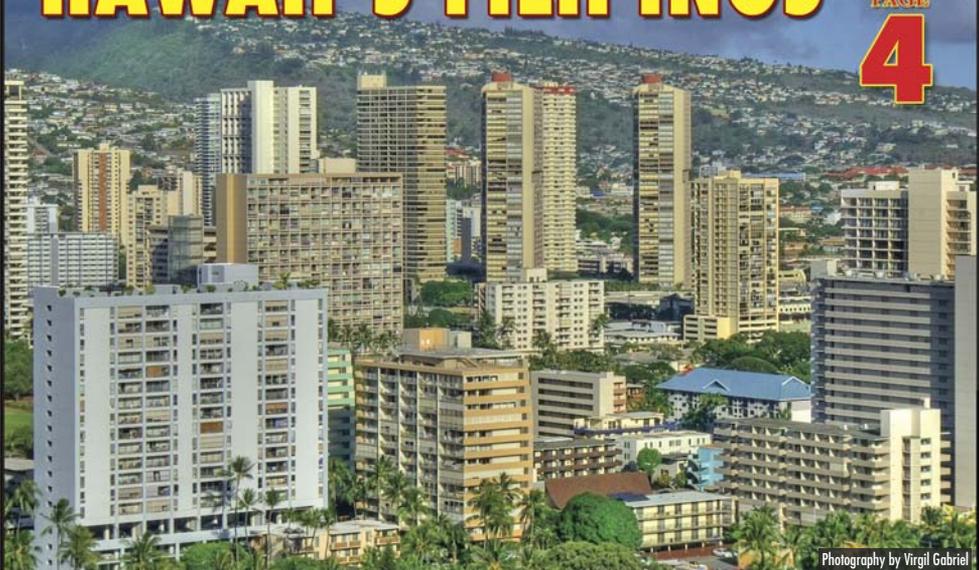
HAWAII'S #1 FILIPINO NEWSPAPER

◆ WEEKLY ◆ JANUARY 23, 2010 ◆

## REAL ESTATE INVESTMENTS ATTRACT HAWAII'S FILIPINOS

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Photography by Virgil Gabriel



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## EDITORIAL

## Home Ownership Still Out of Reach for Many

**A**s Hawaii enters the second decade of the new Millennium, owning a home in paradise continues to be a pipe dream for many local residents.

If there is any good news, it's that home prices on Oahu are falling. In fact, the median price in December 2009 for single-family homes fell by 12 percent to \$550,000, compared to \$625,000 for the previous year. But even with low mortgage rates courtesy of the Federal Reserve and tax credits extended through the end of April 2010, first-time homebuyers still face enormous financial challenges.

There are really only a handful of alternatives for young families: move in with mom and dad and extend their house, or buy in Ewa or the West side of Oahu and suffer the consequences of traffic. Financially-squeezed families have also relocated to the mainland—a decision that more and more kamaaina are making.

Another possibility, particularly for working-class Filipinos on low- to moderate incomes, is to consider real estate opportunities in the Philippines. Filipinos who are priced out of Hawaii's real estate market will find that they can afford high end and rather sizeable properties in the Philippines at very good prices. More than a few 30-something Filipinos have been advised by their parents to buy property back home, work hard and retire early to a life of luxury in the Philippines.

But for those intent on buying a home in Hawaii, the going will be difficult. Saddled with a \$1.2 billion budget deficit, the State will be unable to extend tax credits, subsidies and other government financing offers to developers, which traditionally have been some of the biggest sources to help pay for affordable housing. Policies and initiatives that keep costs down and encourage developers to build more affordable units need to be established at the State and City levels. Until our elected leaders make this a priority, homeownership will continue to be out of reach for many local residents.

## Patience Needed for City's Transit Project

**N**early a month after a missed deadline by the City to break ground for Honolulu's multi-billion dollar transit project, it's really anyone's guess as to when construction will begin.

As it now stands, the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project is awaiting approval from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). City officials are confident that financing, historic preservation and other concerns from the FTA will be addressed. Mayor Hanemann, in fact, spent last week in Washington, D.C. to brief federal transportation officials on Honolulu's project and to assure them that the City is continuing to refine its current financial plan.

State officials are not as positive, as indicated by statements from Gov. Lingle at a recent informational briefing at the State Capitol. According to Lingle, who disclosed that she held private discussions with the FTA, not only are the feds concerned with the City's level of financing but that a "stronger financial plan" will be needed before approval is given. She hosted the briefing to allow a local architect group to present what it claims is a more affordable transit system that calls for part of the alignment to be at street level, or at-grade, rather than completely elevated.

Kudos to the architects for their input, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize that a street level transit line through

## FROM THE PUBLISHER



loha! We hope and trust that your 2010 is coming along well. By the time you pick up this issue, the 2010 Hawaii State Legislature will have already entered its first full week. All eyes will be at the State Capitol during the coming months as lawmakers grapple with an unprecedented \$1.2 billion budget deficit. Much of the pomp and circumstance from previous opening day festivities was canceled and the mood noticeably somber. To prove that they mean business, lawmakers have cut five recess days from the 2010 session to reduce costs and encourage members to focus on the state budget.

Speaking of focus, we encourage you to turn your attention to an article on page 3 entitled "Top 10 Tips for Consumers" from the Better Business Bureau. BBB officials are encouraging Hawaii residents to be more akamai with their finances this year. Savvy consumers will not only save more money but also find themselves less prone to scams and identify theft. We highly recommend that you take the BBB's suggestions to heart, which should help keep you on track for 2010, at least financially.

For this issue's cover story, contributing writer Fiedes Doctor explores the numerous real estate investments that some Filipinos are finding quite attractive. Many Filipinos have been forced to hunker down financially due to the bad economy but a select few are taking advantage of what local real estate experts say is a good market for investors. For those fortunate ones, who are typically professionals in the medical or banking fields, real estate is the best investment. Please read more on this rather intriguing story beginning on page 4.

In other news, we at the Chronicle send our heartfelt congratulations to two Filipino women for their recent accomplishments. Although they come from vastly different backgrounds, both have worked hard to reach the top of their respective fields. The first is Dr. Mary May Ablan who was named as the new president of the Philippine Medical Association (PMAH). We wish her all the very best in her efforts to continue leading PMAH in the coming year. More on Dr. Ablan is available on page 6. The second honoree is Leticia Gamiao, a Waikiki hotel housekeeper who was selected for her exceptional work by the hotel and visitor industry as the 2010 Outstanding Lodging Employee (see page 10). We hope that the success stories of both women will encourage you to strive for even greater levels of excellence in your life.

This issue contains other informative articles, including "Legal Matters" (page 7) and Legal Notes (page 13), which we hope you will enjoy reading. In closing, thank you once again for supporting the Hawaii Filipino Chronicle. It is truly a pleasure to serve all of our readers. We will continually strive to serve the community and to provide you with timely and useful news.

*Chona A. Montesines-Sonido*

Downtown Honolulu during morning and afternoon traffic is a bad idea. Architects focus on aesthetics and looking-good, while engineers are concerned with making it work. While a partially at-grade system would be cheaper, engineers have concluded that given the finite amount of space on Oahu, the entire line must be elevated for the transit system to work. Changing part of the alignment to at-grade would require yet another review and more delays, which would essentially doom the project and further erode public support.

In the meantime, let's be patient as FTA officials dot the i's and cross the t's in their review of the final EIS. Although it has taken longer than expected, the delay is not necessarily cause for concern. Consider it a prudent approach to the largest ever construction project in Hawaii's history and remember that nothing worth having in life is ever easy—including a good transit system.



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## OPEN LETTER

## Caregivers Face More Cuts from State

**A**s you know, the economy has taken a downturn and the government has done a lot of cutbacks. Many of these cutbacks are necessary but where they are applied and who determines the priorities is elusive information that most of us do not know about.

I am the mother of Joshua Hegwood who is mentally challenged and suffers from Cerebral Palsy. He is 26, married and under my care and supervision.

Five years ago, I had a thriving business in real estate but because of the bipolar and

schizophrenic disorder that Joshua acquired, my world collapsed from under me. As a mother who loves him so much, I dedicated my life to him as a full-time caregiver and support specialist. Needless to say, my finances and activities revolved around Joshua's well-being. My daughter, Kristian Lei, who is the CEO of Honolulu Broadway Babies, has received commendations as an advocate for the educational needs of these individuals. She assisted me in taking care of Joshua as a child and even at the onset of his illness.

Joshua's condition was stabilized but his needs are constant. Many of his Goodwill

companions and their families are experiencing a great deal of hardship due to the cutbacks that only the government can justify. There are many others from Arc of Hilo, Health Resources, Care Hawaii, etc.

Many of us suffer from the emotional and financial stress of providing care and housing for these individuals without further assistance from the government.

On January 2nd of this year, Joshua's schizophrenia grew worse. Now in his juvenile stage, he has become more aggressive with violent tendencies when he cannot get what he wants. He was hospitalized and released back to us for future re-

habilitation. There are no therapeutic facilities available outside of a plain foster home or the hospital which has no funding for individuals like him.

I asked over and over for the Lord to heal Joshua. I am sure caregivers and parents like me have the same heartfelt prayer. My appeal to you is to help us reach out to the system to help us in the way that is humane and not to put aside the fact that they are God's children too. They cannot survive without us. They need to be fed, bathed, taken to places, assisted with medications, entertained and trained to be productive if possible. They need therapy and counseling.

Please help us in our endeavor to reach out to those who are in power. We are in danger of losing our homes and our livelihoods because of the lack of support. How can we provide for the needs of Joshua and others like him when we can't even have a secured income and place to house them? They give us hope and the reason to always be grateful for what God has given us.

It is our duty to be there for them. They are the center of our lives and we wholeheartedly accepting this calling but we need you to make our voices heard.

May God bless you all.

**Liza T.H. Yogi**  
Principal Broker  
Aloha Land Realty

## HAWAII-FILIPINO NEWS

## Top 10 Tips For Consumers in 2010

**O**fficials from Hawaii's Better Business Bureau are encouraging local consumers to be more akamai in 2010. Savvy consumers will save more money and be less prone to scams and identity theft.

"Ultimately, being a savvy consumer is about using money wisely, creating a budget, researching businesses before you buy and staying away from scammers," says Dwight Kealoha, chief executive officer of Hawaii's BBB.

The BBB offers the following consumer-savvy tips for 2010:

1. Look for the BBB seal and always check a business out with BBB before you buy. Businesses that display the BBB seal of accreditation on their websites and business locations have met meet BBB Standards for Trust. You can find trustworthy businesses by visiting [bbb.org](http://bbb.org), with BBB Reliability Reports for nearly four million businesses across North America.
2. Fight identity theft. Always shred paper documents that include sensitive financial data and dispose of computers, cell phones and digital data safely. BBB offers tips and checklists on what to shred and hosts annual Secure Your ID events nationwide to help you stay safe.
3. Ask BBB for help. File a

complaint with your BBB if you have a disagreement with a business or have been ripped off by a scammer.

4. Create a budget and stick to it. If you're a cash-strapped consumer, setting a budget can help you stay afloat in 2010. BBB has advice on how to create a budget to help you get out of debt and stay out of debt.
5. Beware of "jobs" that offer easy money. Unemployment is high and scammers are targeting the large pool of job hunters. Beware of any job offer, work-at-home scheme or business opportunity that promises big money for little work and no experience.
6. Always read the fine print—especially for "free" trial offers. Thousands of consumers complained to BBB in 2009 after signing up for a "free" trial offer online that resulted in repeated charges to their credit or debit cards as much as hundreds of dollars every month. Read the terms and conditions of any "free" trial offer before handing over credit or debit card numbers.
7. Keep your computer safe. Install anti-virus software on your computer, and regularly check for software and operating system up-

dates and patches. Don't open attachments or click on links in e-mails unless you can confirm that the e-mail came from someone you trust.

8. Never wire money to someone you don't know. Many scams require that the victim wire money back to the scammers. Tracking money sent via MoneyGram or Western Union is extremely difficult. For victims, it's nearly impossible to get their money back.
9. Fight fake check fraud. With advances in printing technology, scammers

have the ability to create very real-looking but phony checks. Educate yourself on the common types of check fraud and be extremely wary of checks that come with claims that you've won the lottery, are eligible for a government grant or have landed a job as a secret shopper.

10. Get everything in writing. Don't just take a business' word for it. Get every verbal agreement in writing to limit miscommunication and misunderstandings about what you expect and what the business delivers.

For more consumer advice you can trust, visit [bbb.org](http://bbb.org).

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# Real Estate Investments Attract Hawaii's Filipinos

By Fiedes Doctor

**O** it is the best of times, it is the worst of times, writes Charles Dickens, in the opening of his classic novel "A Tale of Two Cities."

Though Dickens' paradoxical statement refers to the French Revolution, it is quite applicable even for today—some more so than others.

The present economic downturn has many Filipinos scrambling to keep their jobs, fighting furloughs and salary cuts, and foregoing restaurant dinners, excessive shopping and travel. After all, this is the worst recession to hit America in 70 years.

But another group sees this slump more as an opportunity than a nightmare. These are the visionaries, the risk-takers of the business world—people who invest their hard earned cash on real estate properties, here or back in the home country.

"This season is the buyer's market. Real estate prices are way down, meaning the values are low compared to a few years ago," says an optimistic

20-year investor in the health field.

He owns several properties in Oahu and in the Philippines ranging from rental or commercial buildings and high-rise condominiums, and foreclosed and distressed properties. He keeps updated on market trends and is ready to purchase if a good deal presents itself.

"If you have the money, now and next year is the best time to buy," he says.

#### Buyer's Market

Michael Mazzella, a Honolulu-based real estate investor who mentors aspiring investors on the side, agrees.

"Absolutely, this is the best time for real estate investors. We make more money in down

markets than in any other time," he says. "There are more motivated sellers, more foreclosures and more short sales. There are more deals out here for us to buy."

Honolulu had a total of 1,186 foreclosures for the third quarter this year, according to RealtyTrac's Foreclosure Market Report. There has been one filed foreclosure for every 282 households, an 85.8 percent increase compared to the same time in 2008 and up 24.8 percent from second quarter this year.

Statistics further show that more homes and condominiums have been sold last October compared to previous months.

"The current rate of sales



Photography by Virgil Gabriel

for both single-family homes and condominiums were both slightly up in October, which is truly encouraging in light of the overall economy," says Sandra Bangerter, president of the Honolulu Board of Realtors, on the organization's website.

October this year showed a 15.6 percent increase in sales of single-family homes and a 20.5 percent increase in condominium sales compared to the same month last year, according to data from the Board of Realtors. The median sales price of single-family homes in Oahu is at \$605,000 this October. Condominiums had a median of \$295,000.

"The median prices for single-family homes were up a bit and down for condominiums, but still within relatively stable price ranges," notes Bangerter. "The first-time homebuyer federal tax credit has been helpful in raising buyer awareness."

A maximum of \$8,000 tax credit is available for first-time homebuyers through April 30, 2010, thanks to the recently signed Homebuyer Tax Credit Extension. The stimulus package also offers a \$6,500 tax credit to current homeowners who may want to purchase another home.

Proponents of the plan believe this would encourage potential buyers to get into the market as 2010 rolls in, thereby nudging the economy back to life.

#### Calculated Risks

As a business venture, reasons for purchasing properties do not vary much among investors. Generally, they just want to stay afloat—although they do "float" and get by more than the average middle class.

"I buy properties because of the tax break, as well as for investments," says Dory Villafuerte, owner of a tax company, who has several properties in the Philippines and in Hawaii. Her last purchase was a house in Makakilo two years ago.

"I will see if it makes money later on," she says.

Another Filipino real estate investor, who requested anonymity, likewise buys properties for tax sheltering and long-term investment.

"I keep properties for the long haul," he says. "Four months ago, I bought a luxury condo. I'll keep it for about 10 to 15 years then sell it. Now is really not the time to sell."

He considers the discount, location, condition of the prop-



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COVER STORY

erty and maintenance needs, including the resale value, before closing a deal.

Other investors buy properties in the Philippines for retirement or vacation needs. They buy large lots in their hometowns in the Ilocos provinces, Baguio City, Tagaytay or Laguna or down in Boracay or Cebu.

For a single career woman with stable employment, a condominium in a plush neighborhood in Makati, the country's business mecca, costs from P900,000 to P30M (roughly \$20,000 to \$650,000). Those who take the plunge into real estate in the Philippines do so wanting an extra place to stay when visiting the country and also as a form of investment.

According to Arlene Alquero, a nurse who started investing in 1986, one of the wisest ways to invest is in real estate.

The wisest way to invest is in real estate, says Arlene Alquero, a nurse who started investing in 1986.

"It is the safest investment; you do not lose. I had bigger returns with real estate



Houses in Upper Kapolei in Makakilo

Photography by Virgil Gabriel

than with stocks," she says. "If you do stocks, you have to be active everyday. With gambling, you do not see where your money goes. With real estate, I have a tangible property. It can also be income-generating."

Her advice is to start small.

"Buy whatever you can afford that will still support the

family and not cramp your style," Alquero says. "Do it one at a time and don't let it go over your head."

Villafuerte stressed the importance of having back-up finances in case of a job loss or unforeseen circumstance.

"Make sure to do your research and make sure you can afford it," she says. "You should have enough cash-flow

to survive for six to eight months."

**Better living**

Most Filipino investors who buy real estate, either second properties or as many as 20, usually work in the healthcare field because of its so-called recession-proof nature. Healthcare is a growing industry with more and more people

growing older and living longer.

"Typical real estate investors are professionals, doctors and nurses, business-minded people. Their jobs are stable," says Jesse Koppel, a real estate agent since 1990. She notes that Filipinos' real estate purchase ranges from the affordable to the luxurious.

"Filipinos buy care homes or apartments, well-known condominiums such as the Trump Tower or nice houses in upscale locations such as east Honolulu, Kahala or Hawaii Kai," she notes.

Or anywhere back in their hometowns.

"I can't wait to retire and go back to the Philippines and live a simpler life," says Francisco Santos, a hotel manager who is presently building a modest three-bedroom home in Cebu. "I'll probably just scuttle back and forth here and there. It's good to have two homes."

In the end, real estate investing is about living better, economic bust or not. Most Filipinos will not have it any other way.

HAWAII-FILIPINO NEWS

**Hotel Industry Names Outstanding Employee**

Leticia Gamiao, housekeeper for the 247-room Aqua Waikiki Wave hotel, was named 2010 Outstanding Lodging Employee at the 20th annual Na Poe Paahana (the hardworking people) Awards Ceremony.

A Waikiki housekeeper for the past 12 years, Gamiao was recognized for her exceptional service for hotel guests, the community and co-workers. She began her career with the Coral Reef and remained with the hotel throughout its renovation—a process which transformed it into the Aqua Waikiki Wave.

"We are so proud of Leticia winning this prestigious industry award," says Lynette Eastman, the hotel's area general manager who nominated Gamiao. "Her hard work is consistently outstanding. She is our shining star."

According to Eastman, Gamiao's cleaning skills, friendliness and attention to detail have delighted the hotel's guests who comment regularly—several times a week, in fact—on her exemplary service.

"She was acknowledged by name on more than 100 comment cards and notes we received in 2009," Eastman says.



Leticia Gamiao

Originally from the Philippines, Gamiao and her husband Amado reside in Kalihi with their six children. She volunteers regularly for her church's community outreach programs and is an active participant in the annual Visitor Industry Charity Walk and Aloha United Way campaigns.

The Na Poe Paahana award honors deserving

Hawaii hotel and lodging industry employees in nine categories: Bell/Valet, Engineering/Maintenance, Food & Beverage, Front Office, Housekeeper, Manager, Security Officer; plus Allied Member of the Year and Outstanding Lodging Employee of the Year. The award is organized by the Hawaii Hotel & Lodging Association (HHLA), the statewide trade association of hotels, hotel management firms, hotel owners, suppliers and other related firms and individuals.

In winning the top honor, Gamiao is HHLA's nominee for the national American Hotel & Lodging Association "Stars of the Industry Awards" which will be held this summer.

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## FEATURE

# Healing Hands: Ablan Takes Lead At PMAH

By Danny De Gracia, II

friends.

"What is most rewarding," she says of the medical profession, "is that you can actually make a difference in the people you are helping, and the difference is always evident, most of the time."

As a mother of three, Dr. Ablan, like so many Hawaii mothers, faces a constant burden to balance the commitment to working for the good of the community and her role as a parent, but has done both splendidly and with great pride.

"The profession is very demanding," Ablan warns. She advises young Filipinos who are considering entering the healthcare field to have a heart for it.

"Encourage those who are truly interested on their own, not from some pressure from other forces, to join," she says. "It truly has to come from within."



Dr. Mary May Ablan

## Healthcare Policy Outlook

Ablan says that Hawaii's healthcare system is unique in that the population knows that their providers are, in general, approachable and available.

"There is a direct connection," she says. "They don't just go on an acute basis because they always feel the physician will be able to see them. They feel at home. I'm not just talking about the financial aspect—it's

about being able to fill in their needs. The state has a lot of approachable physicians. Healthcare is very accessible to them. The state (also) has a lot of public health clinics in spite of not having insurance, so there is somewhat of a safety net for them."

Asked about her thoughts about the need for national healthcare reform and the much discussed Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (H.R. 3590) which is presently before Congress, Dr. Ablan said that some form of healthcare reform is absolutely necessary and a public option should be made available for those with no income or those who are in professions whose employers do not provide the kind of health care options that are suitable to their needs. Like all medical professionals, Dr. Ablan believes that it is im-

portant that people are able to afford to have the ability to get treatment when in need.

"We are a highly developed country, and we are the only developed country that does not have a public option."

Ablan's 2010 vision for PMAH is to revitalize her organization and to draw closer both longstanding and new members alike with a sense of comradeship and unity. "[PMAH] started in 1978 because of friendship," she says. "The organization is one by the membership, and not by just a handful of people. My main goal is to reengage... so we can move on to doing significant projects, to do great things."

Dr. Ablan's upbeat outlook and strong commitment to serving others will certainly prove to be her greatest asset in leading PMAH and keeping those in need on the path to recovery.

## A Special Calling

Dr. Ablan, who graduated from the University of the Philippines in 1978—the same year that PMAH was founded—found a special calling in medicine out of her love for lifelong learning and being near to

## HAWAII-FILIPINO NEWS

# Hawaii Plantation Village to Celebrate Spring Festival

The public is invited to "Breaking Winter: Celebrating the Coming of Spring," which will be held on Saturday, February 6, 2010 at Hawaii's Plantation Village in Waipahu from 10 am to 2 pm. The event is free.

According to Jeffrey Higa, Plantation Village director, the purpose of the event is to celebrate the spring and New Year's holidays and observances that

various ethnic groups brought with them to the plantations.

"Spring and the New Year is a significant time for many cultures," Higa says. "It brings warmth and light to replace the usually dark and cold winter when the world lies dormant."

The Spring Festival will observe Malasadas Day, Lent and the ending of the Makahiki Season. It will also include Kung Siu Lum Pai (Chinese) and

Shishimai (Okinawan)—two lion dance troupes that will be blessing the Plantation Village. At the Shinto shrine, Reverend Daiya Amano will offer a New Year's blessing to visitors and their pets.

The Festival will also have a touch of Filipino culture with the scheduled performances of Mahalohalo Kolintang Ensemble (Filipino) and Tekniqlingz

Dance Crew (Filipino hip hop). Both groups will grace the outdoor stage with other ethnic groups, storytellers and poets, including community volunteer Charlene Cuaresma, who is also president of the Filipino Coalition for Solidarity.

Village staff and volunteers will also hold mochi pounding demonstrations, children's games and a myriad of cultural

presentations at the various ethnic houses. Docents will be available at all ethnic houses to give short presentations on life in the plantations.

As for food, hot dogs, hamburgers, shaved ice and Chinese-style plate lunches will be available for purchase.

More information on the Spring Festival is available by calling 677-0110.

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**IN THIS TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES!**

## PMAH Inducts New Officers

Members of the Philippine Medical Association of Hawaii (PMAH) kicked off their organization's new year with an induction ceremony for its 2010 officers and members of the board on January 23, 2010 at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

- The 2010 officers include:
- Dr. Mary May Ablan, President (Pediatric Allergist)
- Dr. Joseph Zobian, President-elect (Ophthalmologist)
- Dr. Celia Ona, Immediate past president (Psychiatrist)
- Dr. Bertie Santos-Ocampo, Secretary (Rheumatologist)
- Dr. Arnold Villafuerte, Treasurer (Public Health Educator)



**PMAH**

understanding between and among Filipino physicians in Hawaii and to foster leadership in public service among members and associates.

Members of the PMAH board include Drs. Elizabeth Abinsay, Gabino Baloy, Sorbella Guillermo, Anthony Guerrero, Fritzi Igno, Nicanor Joaquin and Russell Kelly.

The 300-plus guests in attendance heard from guest speaker Dr. Chiyome Fukino, who is also the director of the State Department of Health. Leading the installation of officers were Philippine Consul General Leoncio Cardenas, Jr.

The goal of the non-profit PMAH is to promote better un-

derstanding between and among Filipino physicians in Hawaii and to foster leadership in public service among members and associates. PMAH members are actively involved in community service. Two of the organization's enduring legacies are the establishment of Aloha Medical Mission and the Bayanihan Clinic Without Walls. Many PMAH members are actively involved in both groups, which through the years have provided free medical, surgical, and other health-related services, supplies, and equipment to medically indigent areas throughout Hawaii, the Philippines, Southeast Asia and the Pacific.





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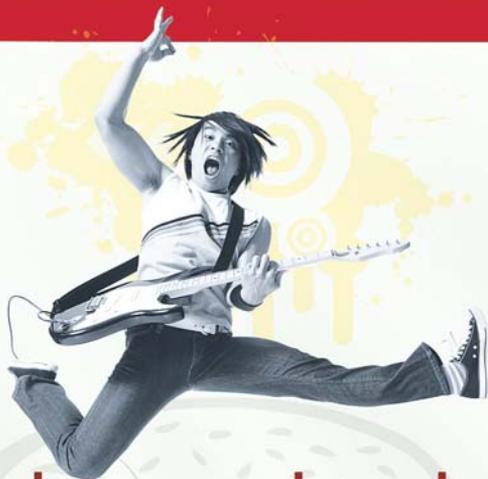


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**PHILIPPINE NEWS**



**House Leaders Forced  
to Drop Charter Change  
Resolution**

By Paolo Romero /  
Friday, Jan. 22, 2010

**M**ANILA, Philippines - With senators firmly against Charter change (Cha-cha) under the current administration, the House leadership is left with no choice but to defer discussions on the issue, according to Speaker Prospero Nograles.

"I don't want to waste time debating here in the House on a measure which the Senate would not act upon. It's a waste of time," Nograles told reporters. "We'd like to tackle that (constitutional convention bill) pero mukhang ayaw naman nila ipagpatuloy (but it seems they don't want to continue.)"

The House leader also brushed aside proposals for the holding of a special session, saying most government officials have already firmed up their schedules for

the campaign.

"I don't know what else we need to tackle that we will call back all the congressmen who are now practically campaigning. And technically, there is no premature campaigning. It might be difficult to call a quorum," Nograles pointed out.

"So, it's very difficult to stop the momentum and the concentration that we are having," Nograles, a last-term congressman who is seeking the majority post in Davao City, stressed.

Senators, some of whom are running for president in the coming elections, have voiced opposition to reopening Charter change debates at this time.

President Arroyo, who is running for congresswoman in the second district of her hometown in Pampanga, reportedly wants Cha-cha to prosper so she can become prime minister, in case she gets elected as speaker by her future House peers... ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))

**PC, Internet Needed in Pinoy  
Households, says JDV III**

By Paolo Romero /  
Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2010

**M**ANILA, Philippines - There should be a computer connected to the Internet in every Filipino home to give everyone access to livelihood and educational opportunities and bring the country firmly into the Information Age, IT businessman Joey de Venecia III said yesterday.

"This is not an impossible dream, but rather a realizable goal," he said, as he called for the next administration to make this and information technology education a sustained part of the national government budget.

De Venecia said a personal computer, Internet access and information support will have an immediate and dramatic impact on Filipino families. This would give them enhanced educational and livelihood opportunities that are only available from IT, and a means for OFW families to re-integrate with their loved ones working abroad by commuting on the cyber-highway.

"Students will have the entire world as their library and they will hone up on the skills we need to become truly competitive in the 21st century. All OFWs

abroad can be involved in the day-to-day lives of their families back home, while families can engage in IT businesses like e-commerce and delivery of out-sourced services from their own homes," he said.

One of the country's pioneer IT businessmen, De Venecia said that because the cost of PCs has gone down drastically in the last few years, they should be a standard part of every household, much like TV sets, electric fans and gas stoves.

Between the country's three major telecommunication companies, Internet connection is also available just about everywhere in the Philippines, De Venecia added.

De Venecia said that he had high hopes for the continued growth of the IT industry in the country.

He explained that when he set up the first call center in the country in 1997, little did the public know that this segment of the IT industry would soon become the fastest growing business. Today, there are some 600,000 Filipinos employed in the call center industry.

De Venecia said it was possible that employment in the IT industry could be in the millions in a few years, given enough incentives by government. ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))

PHILIPPINE NEWS

# RP Debt Rises to P4.424 Trillion

By Iris C. Gonzales /  
Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2010

**M**ANILA, Philippines - The National Government's debt stock climbed to P4.424 trillion as of end-October 2009 following the issuance of \$1 billion in global bonds during the month and the depreciation of the peso during the period, latest data from the Bureau of the Treasury (BTr) showed.

Total outstanding debt increased by two percent or P86

billion from the end-September level of P4.338 trillion, of which the government owed P1.975 trillion or 45 percent to foreign creditors and P2.449 trillion or 55 percent to domestic creditors.

Theoretically, at P4.424 trillion, each of the 92.23 million Filipinos is indebted by roughly P47, 968.

The BTr said domestic debt increased by P25 billion or one percent from the end-September 2009 level as the National Government issued more Treasury

bills and bonds than it had redeemed during the period.

The National Government's foreign debt, increased by P61 billion or 3.2 percent over the end-September level as the country issued more than it borrowed during the period.

In October last year, the government sold \$1 billion in global bonds, its third bond sale in 2009. In January last year, the government also sold \$1.5 billion in dollar-denominated bonds and in July, it raised \$750 million also from the sale of

bonds. The government's total foreign commercial borrowings last year amounted to \$3.2 billion.

The contingent debt of the National Government, meanwhile, declined to P565 billion or P14 billion lower from the end-September 2009 level of P579 billion because of repayments.

Contingent debt is composed of guarantees issued by the National Government.

The government borrows from local and foreign lenders to finance its budgetary requirements.

It has been trying to put the

country's fiscal house in order but external developments, administrative loopholes in revenue collection and rampant corruption in government revenue agencies continue to blot the deficit.

The government's budget deficit had ballooned to P272.5 billion as of end- November 2009, way above last year's programmed ceiling of P250 billion.

Finance officials are bracing for a budget gap of just below P300 billion for 2009 and they expect the deficit to hit P293 billion this year. ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))

# ALI Allots P20 Billion for Ayala Center Facelift

By Zinnia B. Dela Peña /  
Thursday, Jan. 21, 2010

**M**ANILA, Philippines - Bent on keeping the Makati central business district at the forefront of masterplanned developments in the country, property giant Ayala Land Inc. (ALI) is injecting P20 billion over the next three to five years for a major facelift of the 40-year-old Ayala Center.

The redevelopment of the five-hectare Ayala Center, the flagship mixed-use urban city complex of the Ayala Group, is being hailed as a long-sought catalyst for the rebirth of Makati, the country's financial capital.

The move also signifies ALI's bullish stance on the real estate industry, which has seen remarkable growth since the second half of last year.

Following a cautious tack in 2009, ALI is aggressively stepping up its construction and investment activities with plans to sell a total of 9,200 residential units this year or nearly four times the number of units sold the previous year, said company chairman Fernando Zobel de Ayala in a press briefing Tuesday night.

Zobel said ALI's bullishness stems from the return of investor confidence, stable remittances from overseas Filipino workers, low interest rates and improving global market conditions.

"The first half of last year ba-



Fernando Zobel de Ayala

sically had everyone moving very cautiously as we saw the crises in the US and Europe unfold. But we saw a very dramatic turn when we got to June of last year. With a renewed confidence and a feeling that people wanted to go back to the market once again after they have seen

the US crisis play out, we saw the market pick up quite significantly starting in July last year. The market went on to gain quite a bit of strength towards the end of last year and we're seeing a strong start up to this year," Zobel said.

"The conditions continue to strengthen for a very robust real estate cycle, interest rates continue to be low, remittances continue to grow although the

growth has been less than the past years and banks are in a very healthy condition," he added.

For its first salvo this year, ALI is accelerating the makeover of Ayala Center with the construction of an upscale residential enclave, (Park Terraces), two office buildings, a shopping mall and a businessman's hotel.

Less than half of the programmed P20-billion capital budget will go to Park Terraces, with the rest going to the continued refurbishment of the retail shops and the establishment of

office buildings. The project would be financed largely by internal cash and some borrowings the company has previously arranged.

ALI president Antonio Aquino said this would be the most ambitious redevelopment of the Ayala Center, which has undergone three makeovers since the 1960's.

Aquino said the three-tower Park Terraces, will make available a total of 370 units, priced at between P5 million and P40 million. Unit sizes range from 37 square meters to 270 square meters. ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))

# South Korean Agribusiness Firm to Source Tuna from RP

By Zinnia B. Dela Peña /  
Thursday, Jan. 21, 2010

**M**ANILA, Philippines (Xinhua) - South Korean agribusiness firm Woorinanch Co. Ltd. is keen on importing a minimum of 200 metric tons of sashimi-grade tuna from Philippine firm Luenthai Fishing Ventures and a group of small-scale fishermen, a senior agriculture official said Wednesday.

"Woorinanch will import 200 tons of sashimi-grade tuna for one month. It is looking to source tuna from local companies and fishers' groups for one year," Marris Agbon, president of Philippine Agricultural Development and Commercial

Corp. (PADCC), told reporters in an interview at the sidelines of the closing ceremonies of the Coral Triangle Business Initiative Summit.

PADCC is the corporate arm of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Agbon said Woorinanch signed a memorandum of understanding with Luenthai, PADCC and Pampano, a group of small-scale fishermen.

Agbon said the initial volume will be split between Luenthai and Pampano. Luenthai alone could not supply all the requirements of Woorinanch.

The monthly shipments of sashimi-grade tuna is valued at \$1 million.

In keeping with the objective of the Coral Triangle Initiative, the DA will encourage the use of circle hooks particularly among fishermen from Pampano.

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) said the introduction of circle hooks in longline fleets has reduced the number of sea turtles caught by up to 80 percent. This translated into thousands of individual turtles saved from almost certainly mortality.

The WWF said new circle hooks less likely to be swallowed by turtles than traditional J-shaped hooks, which cause suffocation or internal bleeding when swallowed. Circle hooks are also easier to unhook from a snagged animal. ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))

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## PHILIPPINE NEWS

# Kenney: RP Made Me Value Family

By Ana Marie Pamintuan /  
Thursday, Jan. 21, 2009

**M**ANILA, Philippines - Kristie Anne Kenney leaves the Philippines on Monday with two indelible lessons learned from Filipinos: the importance of taking time out to celebrate.

Kenney, whose original departure, scheduled last Jan. 17, was delayed by a bout with pneumonia, will be staying in Washington for several months to keep her mother company.

Her 86-year-old mother, though unable to ever visit her in Manila, was healthy enough to live alone in the US capital until several months ago, when symptoms of dementia started emerging.

America's top diplomat in Manila admitted she wanted to stay longer in the Philippines for the general elections in May,

but "what I've learned here is the importance of family... it's being here that influenced me so much."

"She's slipping away," she said, referring to her mother.

Kenney's only brother, an electrical engineer who also caters as a hobby, has just started a family and cannot attend to their mother full time.

The US ambassador visited The STAR yesterday afternoon to bid goodbye.

Another "great thing" she learned from Filipinos, she said, is taking time out to celebrate events in life.

"It makes life more meaningful; it leaves memories... it creates better teamwork in the office," she said. "It's really nice and it really makes a huge difference."

Kenney has been lauded for her indefatigable efforts to promote better ties between the two countries. She has visited the



Amb. Kristie Anne Kenney

conflict areas of Mindano many times as part of US government efforts to bring peace, education and development, particularly in Sulu and Basilan.

She arrived in Manila in early 2006 amid the controversial rape case involving US Marine Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith and a Filipino woman named Nicole.

Smith was convicted by a regional trial court but acquitted by the Court of Appeals, shortly before Nicole left the Philip-

ppines for the United States, "for good," according to relatives.

Amid the furor, Kenney said her government saw no need for the two countries to renegotiate the Visiting Forces Agreement, which gave the US embassy custody of Smith throughout his trial.

Last year, President Arroyo met with newly elected US President Barack Obama in Washington.

During the 45-minute meeting at the White House, the two leaders reaffirmed the two countries' partnership. Obama also impressed upon President Arroyo the importance of pushing through with the general elections in May 2010 and a peaceful transfer of power.

Yesterday, Kenney expressed confidence that the elections would push through. She cited the "happiness factor" in the typical Filipino and said she herself "has always been a positive person."

Looking back on her four

years in Manila, Kenney said she would have brought in more US Peace Corps volunteers to help in Philippine development efforts.

But her "hugest regret" is "not learning more Tagalog." Before coming to Manila, Kenney was told there was no need to learn the national language because everyone spoke English.

"That was wrong," she said. "The good news is my successor is learning... he should speak better Tagalog. He's a lot more mellow than I am. I'm pretty hyperactive... and he's a good golfer."

"He" is Harry Thomas, a career diplomat like Kenney. America's first female ambassador to Manila will be replaced by the first black one. Thomas is awaiting confirmation by the US Congress.

Kenney described her four-year stay in the Philippines as "fast and fabulous."

(www.philstar.com)

# Icban Named New Press Secretary

By Paolo Romero /  
Friday, Jan. 22, 2010

**M**ANILA, Philippines - President Arroyo has appointed Manila Bulletin editor-in-chief Crispulo Julio Icban Jr. as acting press secretary, following the death of Press Secretary Cerge Remonde.

She said she would issue new appointment papers for Icban when Congress goes on break next month.

Icban was born on Aug. 3, 1935 in Tondo, Manila. His fa-

ther, Crispulo Sr., hails from Lubao, Pampanga, Mrs. Arroyo's hometown. His mother Mercedes Julio is from Pura, Tarlac.

Icban graduated valedictorian from Tarlac Central Elementary School in 1946 and was also the valedictorian of Class 1950 of the Pampanga High School.

He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English, magna cum laude, from the University of the Philippines where he was the editor-in-chief of the Philip-

pine Collegian.

Icban also has a Master's degree in Journalism from Syracuse University on Fulbright and Smith-Mundt grants and attended the Nieman Fellowship Program at Harvard University.

He worked at The Manila Times starting in 1954 in various capacities, including reporter and later news editor, until the paper was shut down by martial law in 1972.

Icban joined Manila Bulletin in 1974 and became editor-in-chief in 2003.

Mrs. Arroyo said it was through Remonde she learned

that a media practitioner would make a good press secretary.

## Posthumous award

Meanwhile, the President conferred yesterday the Order of Lakandula on Remonde for his service to the nation.

The posthumous award was received by Remonde's widow Marit, who was given a plaque and a medal.

Remonde gave his life for his country in his work as a journalist and public servant, the President said.

In her brief message after Remonde's remains were brought to the Malacañang Heroes' Hall, the President said the

late Cabinet official's training as a journalist contributed in shaping the policies of her administration and helped her become a better leader.

She said Remonde passed away last Tuesday morning at the peak of his second career in government.

"He reached the peak of journalism, he reached the peak of public service as a Cabinet member. And so he deserved it all," a teary-eyed Mrs. Arroyo said.

"Cerge gave fully of himself for the sake of our country both in government for the last nine years and in media since he was 18 years old." (www.philstar.com)

# 4th Pinoy Fatality Found in Haiti

By Jaime Laude /  
Friday, Jan. 22, 2010

**M**ANILA, Philippines - Rescuers retrieved the body of the last missing Filipino peacekeeper from underneath the collapsed United Nations headquarters in earthquake-stricken Haiti on Wednesday.

Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) spokesman Lt. Col. Romeo Brawner Jr. said the remains of Air Force Sgt. Janice Aroena were retrieved nine days after a powerful earthquake flattened the Christopher Hotel, headquarters of the UN peacekeeping forces in the capital Port-au-Prince.

The retrieval of Aroena's body raised the Philippines' death toll in the earthquake from three to four.

Filipino troops along with UN peacekeeping forces in Haiti earlier retrieved the bodies of Data Processor-3 Pearly Pananguy, Army Sgt. Eustacio Bermudez, and UN peacekeeper Jerome Yap.

Brawner said the remains of the three Filipino peacekeepers would be transferred to the UN Log Base in Port-au-Prince and to an airport in neighboring Dominican Republic for the flight home.

Brawner said Lt. Col. Lope Dagoy, the contingent commander of the 10th peacekeep-

ing force, has made arrangements with the UN representative in Haiti to transport the remains of the three Filipino soldiers.

At the same time, Brawner relayed the message of condolence and sympathy of the AFP to the families of the three Filipino peacekeepers.

The three were among 500 Filipinos in Haiti, including 172 soldiers and police assigned with the UN peacekeeping force, when a massive quake hit the country on Jan. 12.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said two more Filipino workers in Haiti are still missing. (www.philstar.com)



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LEGAL NOTES

# What Happens In A Deportation Hearing



By Reuben S. Seguritan

**E**ach year the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) removes or deports hundreds of thousands of aliens from the U.S. In 2008, deportation totaled 358,883.

There are no figures yet in 2009, but judging from the DHS press release, the number should be much more.

Not included in the above statistics are the 811,000 foreign nationals who accepted an offer to return to their home country in 2008 without a removal order.

Deportation or removal is a harsh punishment. It is important that one should know what happens in the process.

Removal or deportation pro-

ceedings are initiated by the DHS with the service of a Notice To Appear (NTA) on an individual who violated immigration laws. The NTA is filed with one of the 55 immigration courts and it orders the individual to appear before an immigration judge.

There are currently 55 immigration courts in the country and more than 230 immigration judges. The immigration court schedules a removal hearing upon its receipt of the NTA.

Removal proceedings start with a master calendar hearing where the individual is informed by a judge about the immigration law that he violated.

At the scheduled individual hearing, the DHS is represented by a government attorney while the individual may at his expense get a lawyer or other authorized representative.

During the hearing, the individual may admit that he is removable and then apply for

relief such as voluntary departure, asylum, adjustment of status, cancellation of removal, or other remedies provided by immigration law.

A voluntary departure allows the individual to return to his home country at his own expense without the stigma of formal removal.

An asylum is granted to an individual who is unable to return to his home country because of past persecution or well-founded fear of future persecution based upon his race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

Adjustment of status as a relief is available to an individual who is the beneficiary of a petition filed by a family member or an employer and a visa number is immediately available.

Cancellation of removal as a discretionary relief may be availed of by a lawful permanent

resident or a non-permanent resident.

It may be granted to a permanent resident if he has been residing in the U.S for at least five (5) years as a permanent resident, has continuously resided at least seven (7) years after his lawful admission and has not been convicted of an aggravated felony.

This relief may be granted to a nonpermanent resident if he has been continuously present in the U.S. for at least ten (10) years and has been a person of good moral character and during that time has not been convicted of an offense that would make him removable and must prove that his removal would result in exceptional and extremely unusual hardship to his immediate family members who are U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents.

The immigration judge may also conduct other hearings during the removal process such as

bond determination, rescission hearing and in absentia hearing.

An individual who does not appear during a scheduled hearing may be ordered removed in his absence if there is clear, unambiguous and convincing evidence that he is removable.

After the removal hearing, the judge renders a decision. If he grants a relief from removal, the individual may remain in the U.S. temporarily or permanently. If the judge orders his removal, he may appeal. A judge's decision may be appealed to the Board of Immigration Appeals by action by either the DHS or the individual. The decision of the BIA may be appealed by the individual, but not by the DHS to the appropriate federal circuit Court of Appeals.

REUBEN S. SEGURITAN has been practicing law for over 30 years. For further information, you may call him at (212) 695 5281 or log on to his website at [www.seguritan.com](http://www.seguritan.com)

MAINLAND NEWS

## White House Chef Competes in Iron Chef America

**C**risteta Comerford, head chef of the White House, appeared in a recent episode of the wildly-popular cable TV cooking series "Iron Chef America."

The Manila-born Comerford teamed with Bobby Flay to defeat opponents Emeril Lagasse and Mario Batali in a battle using ingredients from the White House's very own

vegetable garden. The fresh produce included kale, rhubarb, broccoli and Japanese eggplant.

Both teams prepared five dishes for the judges—chief Nigella Lawson, Olympic gold medal swimmer Natalie Coughlin and actress Jane Seymour. Batali and Lagasse made scallops with a radish and fennel salad, a trio of oys-

ters and salads, sweet potato and ricotta ravioli, quail and turkey wrapped in vegetables, and a sweet corn beignet for dessert.

Comerford and Flay prepared a fennel and apple salad with oyster, another salad with lobster and squid, a Filipino-inspired broccoli clam chowder, a barbecue veggie dish, and a meringue sweet

potato tart.

Both teams scored equally in the taste category, but Comerford and Flay were victorious due to their presentation and originality.

Mrs. Obama made a brief appearance during the show to welcome the chefs and make her pitch for a pet project called the Healthy Kids Initiative that aims to reduce child-

hood obesity through improved school lunches, farmers market, community gardens and exercise.

Comerford has been executive chef at the White House since 2005. She was hired by former First Lady Laura Bush and retained by current First Lady Michelle Obama. Comerford is the first woman and first minority to be selected as White House head chef. (Good News Pilipinas)

## San Francisco PD Sends Officers to Manila

**T**he Philippine Consulate San Francisco hosted a send-off reception for officers of the San Francisco Police Department who will be departing for the 7th Annual Exchange Training Program with the Philippine National Police (PNP) from January 20 - February 5, 2010.

Headed by Lt. Eric Quema, the 14-member delegation will join law enforcement officers from the PNP, the National Police College and the Philippine National Police Academy for a two-week training program to be conducted in Metro Manila.

The training will include symposiums, seminars and lectures on tactical skills, industrial

security, transit security, crime scene investigation, terrorism awareness and other technical matters given by speakers from both countries.

"The continued success of the exchange program between the PNP and the SFPD is proof of the strong bilateral cooperation between the Philippines and the U.S. in such key areas as counterterrorism, defense security and law enforcement," says Consul General Marciano A. Paynor, Jr. "The program also strengthens professional ties and promotes camaraderie among peacekeepers from our two countries."

The program was conceptualized 10 years ago by full-time SFPD officers of Filipino ethnicity. Over the years, the PNP has returned the favor by send-

ing delegations to San Francisco.

This year's delegation is the biggest contingent ever to the Philippines and includes representatives of San Francisco's multi-racial and multi-cultural communities. In a new twist, several Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) police officers will be going to Manila and joining all aspects of the training program.

"The continuing development in the Philippines requires improving the way we secure vital infrastructures, especially our transit systems and roadways," says Consul General Paynor. "The participation of transit police officers and other field specialists will create learning experiences that should greatly benefit members of both law enforcement agencies." (DEA)

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## MAINLAND NEWS

## Glitzy Rites Kick Off Fight

By Abac Cordero /  
Thursday, Jan. 21, 2009

ARLINGTON, Texas — Standing under the world's largest high-definition television and surrounded by Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders, Manny Pacquiao and Joshua Clotey were all smiles for the announcement of their welterweight fight on Tuesday.

The March 13 bout will be the first boxing match at the \$1.2 billion Cowboys Stadium.

"This is going to be the Super Bowl of boxing," said Freddie Roach, Pacquiao's trainer.

Not really. That would've been the hoped-for matchup between Pacquiao and Floyd Mayweather Jr., which was scuttled after Mayweather outlined a drug testing plan Pacquiao wouldn't accept.

Had that fight come together, it would have been in Las Vegas. So as far as Cowboys owner Jerry Jones was concerned, things worked out just fine.

"It did," Jones said, smiling. "This gave us an opening. We were very aggressive. We were pretty quick to make a deal."

Pacquiao's promoter Bob Arum was smitten by the stadium during negotiations for a



Manny Pacquiao in Texas

possible Pacquiao-Mayweather fight. Arum returned for a Cowboys playoff game, sitting near former President George W. Bush in Jones' box.

Arum has promoted fights at the Astrodome and at Yankee Stadium. He predicts Cowboys Stadium "will have a big role in boxing for years to come."

"I have never, ever seen anything like it," Arum said. "There is nothing in the world like this place. It just blows you away."

The stadium is hosting the NBA All-Star Game next month and will host the Super Bowl next year. It's also in the running as a World Cup site, should football's showcase come to the United States.

Money talks and Jones believes he can make it financially worthwhile for fighters. His goal is to host up to four or five fights a year, "once we es-

tablish that we are the place to fight and have the kind of stature that we want to have." He used Madison Square Garden as a comparison.

For this fight, the Cowboys are planning to sell around 40,000 seats, offering tickets on all but the highest decks.

Jones vowed that fight night will be even splashier than the news conference, where sparklers fired from the tips of the flagpoles, and Michael Buffer gave his signature introduction.

The boxers praised each other on Tuesday, and also were gushing over the facility and the glitzy news conference.

(www.philstar.com)

## GLOBAL NEWS

## PNP to Get P7-Million EU Grant to Boost Human Rights Training

By Mike Frialde /  
Thursday, Jan. 21, 2009

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippine National Police (PNP) will be receiving 106,000 Euros (about P7 million) from the European Union in support of its ongoing drive to boost reforms in the national police organization, particularly on the

area of human rights.

PNP chief Director General Jesus Verzosa said the EU grant is part of the European Union-Philippine Justice Support Program (EPJUST), a bilateral partnership that aims to strengthen the Philippine government's efforts to address extra-legal killings, enforced disappearances, and other human rights concerns.

"The PNP's law enforcement mission includes the duty to respect and uphold human rights. The EPJUST program will significantly boost police reforms especially in the area of human rights promotion," Verzosa said.

The PNP chief said that under the program, technical assistance will be provided to enhance human rights training



Director General Jesus Verzosa

and strengthen capabilities of government agencies including monitoring, investigation, and prosecution of human rights violations.

"Human rights education and training are important but we will not stop there. The investigation of human rights cases involving erring police personnel will continue," Verzosa said.

He added that the PNP's Directorate for Investigation and Detective Management (DIDM), Crime Laboratory Group (CLG), Training Service (TS), and Human Rights Affairs Office (HRAO) will be the key offices that will be involved in the planning and implementation of EPJUST-supported projects in the PNP.

"There is a need to further

improve the professionalism and competency levels of police personnel as a means to reduce operational lapses that lead to human rights violations," he said.

Verzosa added that human rights promotion is one of the priority key result areas of the ongoing PNP Integrated Transformation Program, the long-term reform initiative of the agency.

The EPJUST program's total budget of 3.9-million Euros or about P269 million will be allocated to other government agencies including the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Commission on Human Rights, and qualified civil society organizations. The program is expected to be completed by March 2011.

Meanwhile, Verzosa said the checkpoints now being manned by PNP and military personnel to impose the election gun ban will be "showcases" of human rights observance.

Verzosa gave the assurance as he reminded all police unit commanders to closely supervise checkpoint operations put up to enforce the nationwide gun ban during the 150-day election period. (www.philstar.com)

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## GLOBAL NEWS

### Swedish Church Installs First Filipino Priest

Saint Nicolai Church in Linköping, Sweden has installed Fr. Gabriel Baldostamon as its newest parish priest.

Born in Mindanao, Fr. Gabriel is Sweden's first Filipino Roman Catholic parish priest. He will be attending to the spiritual needs of the entire Swedish Roman Catholic com-

munity in Linköping. The parish has about 2,500 people registered members, according to the Philippine embassy.

Fr. Gabriel is a missionary from the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ in Marbel, South Cotabato. He is fluent in Swedish and has served the Filipino community in Sweden for the past several years.

There are about 92,000 Roman Catholics in Sweden. Linköping is the country's fifth largest city, located 172 kilometers southwest of the capital, Stockholm.

Maria Zeneida Angara Collinson, Philippine Ambassador to Sweden, expressed pride over Fr. Gabriel's installation as parish priest and is confident of his ability to renew and strengthen the Catholic faith, particularly in the context of increasing secularism in Europe.

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### Pinay is 1st Runner-up in Ford Supermodel Global Search

The Freeman / Thursday, Jan. 21, 2009

C EBU, Philippines - A Filipina model won 1st runner-up at the "Ford Supermodel of the World 2009" Finals held in Sao Paulo, Brazil on January 15. Charlene Louise "Chat" Almarvez, 16, won a \$150,000 (P6.9 million) modeling contract from Ford Models NYC, a prestigious modeling agency founded in 1947. Grand prize winner was Katrina Karina Caune, 16, of Baltics State, while third place was Isabelle Storck from Sweden.



Charlene Louise Chat Almarvez

Almarvez, a statuesque and mocha-skinned beauty, is originally from Laguna and is a student at the College of Saint Benilde. Long-legged, willowy and endowed with

delicate features; Almarvez was the only Asian to make it to the Top 7 at the Supermodel of the World 2009 Finals.

Ford Supermodel of the World, which started in 1980, is the largest & most prestigious international competition in the globe, with over 60,000 contestants from 40 countries worldwide. It serves as the worldwide talent search Ford Models. Former Ford Models talents include actresses Lindsay Lohan, Kirsten Dunst, Jennifer Connelly, & Chanel Iman (who won as "Supermodel of the World 2005") among others. ([www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com))



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