

## THE PHILIPPINE BICOL ASSOCIATION, A HISTORY

The year 2000 marks the 10th year of the founding of the Philippine Bicol Association of British Columbia (PBABC), an organization of former residents of the Bicol Region coming from the [provinces of Albay, Masbate, Sorsogon, Catanduanes, Camarines Sur and Camarines Norte](#).

The Bicolanos in Greater Vancouver have along found a need for an association of their own to enable them to get together socially, provide service to folks back home and nurture their deeply religious upbringing. When Bishop Jose Sorra of the Diocese of Virac visited Vancouver in 1983 and spoke at a fund raising dinner attended by local Bicolanos to help support some worthy projects in that diocese, he exhorted those present to organize an association for Bicolanos similar to those ones already existing in the United States.

Seven years later, the first meeting initiated by Lisalandy Serrano Parado and attended by Max and Connie Dayupay, Chuchi Planes Pineda, Mardo Pineda and Isabel Abundo Custodio was held at the Dayupay residence in Vancouver to discuss ways and means of forming a local group. It provided the spark for more exploratory meetings involving concerned Bicolanos, all designed to generate interest in a proposed organization. The first big gathering, attended by 120 Bicolanos was held at the Ambleside Park in West Vancouver.

That potluck picnic was followed by a Dinner-Dance at Corpus Christi Social Hall on September 11, 1990. On that occasion, the founding officers, headed by Chuchi Planes Pineda as president were inducted into office. The other officers were: Max Dayupay, vice-president; Hilda Abundo Yee, secretary; Amalia Estrella, assistant secretary; Celie Kare Gallego, treasurer; Pat Pascal, assistant treasurer, Luis Abundo, Sr., auditor; Elizabeth Valenciano Cruz, business manager; Marilyn Abundo Cunanan, PRO; and Fred Gonzalez, sgt-at-arms. The directors were: Rafaela Hombrebueno, Lina Lomeda, Della Taniajura Saavedra, Romy Barbosa, Roque Relevante, Salvador Balana, Jose Fernando Lee, Cesar Banares and Domingo Azur. The advisers were: Lisalandy Serrano Parado and Isabel Abundo Custodio. On December 15, 1990, the association held a well-attended Christmas Party for Bicolano families at St. Paul's Church Hall in Richmond.

The first formal election of the officers and directors of the Philippine Bicol Association of British Columbia was held at Trout Lake Park in Vancouver on July 7, 1991. The 15 elected board members for the 1991-1992 term subsequently elected from among themselves the officers of the association for a two-year term headed by Jose Fernando Lee as president. The new board members immediately proceeded finalizing the registration of its Constitution and By-Laws. It was on November 13, 1991 that the Registrar of Companies in Victoria issued the association's Certificate of Incorporation No.S-28305 under the Society Act. Nonoy Lee and his officers were inducted into office at the Inaugural Dinner and Ball held at Fantasy Garden World on November 22, 1991.

Under Nonoy Lee's administration, the first issue of **Bicol Express**, the association's newsletter was published, designed to make local Bicolanos aware of the latest happenings in their community and to highlight the activities of their association. The PBABC also conducted a fund-raising campaign to provide assistance to the victims of Mayon Volcano's eruption which claimed the lives of 68 victims and rendered thousands homeless. The \$1,000 raised in donations was distributed to the typhoon victims by Bishop Jose Sorra of Virac, a well-known charity proponent in the Bicol Region. Bishop Sorra visited Vancouver on October 4, 1992 and officiated mass at St. Andrew's Parish attended by many Bicolanos and other Filipino-Canadians. After the mass, the Bishop had dinner with the some officers and members at Hon Lock Restaurant. He reminded those present that Bicolanos are religious by nature and their association must put spiritual emphasis in their program of activities such as the celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Penafrancia.

The first Penafrancia Celebration was held at St. Patrick's Parish in Vancouver. After a nine-day novena, some 150 Bicolanos and friends gathered for a special mass at Fantasy Garden in Richmond followed by a solemn procession around the beautiful garden.

Luis Abundo, Sr. was inducted as new president for the 1993-1994 term at the Holiday Inn City Centre in Vancouver on November 30, 1993. Although he was a few months short of completing his term, resigning for health reasons, his administration continued with vigor the fund raising for the victims of Mayon Volcano's eruption, the annual Family Picnic at Trout Lake, the Penafrancia Celebration culminating with a procession and dinner at Fantasy Gardens. He also provided leadership in a successful Christmas Dinner and Dance at Fantasy Garden.

Mario Garchitorena completed the unfinished term of Luis Abundo Sr. in 1994 and was himself elected president for the 1995-1997 term. During Mario's administration, PBABC sent a \$1,000 donation to the victims of Mayon Volcano eruption and contributed another \$1,000 to the fund drive initiated by the Canadian Red Cross Society for the victims of the major typhoon which devastated the Bicol Region and other parts of the Philippines. The association also sent two Balakbayan boxes with medical supplies to Camarines Norte Regional Hospital and the Rural Health Unit in Daet, Camarines Norte.

The association continued with the annual celebration of the Feast of the Virgin of Penafrancia. It also participated in the celebration of the Feast of San Lorenzo Ruiz, the **Simbang Gabi** at St Patrick's Parish and the fund raising activities of the Philippine Community Centre Society by sponsoring a pageant contestant.

Marilyn Abundo Cunanan was inducted president for the 1998-1999 term at a well-attended Inaugural Dinner and Dance held at Renfrew Park Community Centre. The affair had some visiting movie stars headed by Christopher de Leon as special guests. Highlights of the association's activities under Marilyn's administration include its participation in the celebration of the Philippine Centennial at the Plaza of Nations on June 13, 1998. The association was commended for its well-received presentation of "Modern Times," showcasing the important events in the country from the Japanese Occupation to the year of the Philippine Centennial (1998) with selected officers and members playing the role of various Philippine presidents during that period.

The association sent five youth delegates to the **Provincial Discovery Conference** in Victoria on August 28-30, 1998. The youth delegates were very active in the conference of young people, mostly Filipino-Canadians, from all over the province. The first fluvial cruise, following the nine-day novena for the Virgin of Penafrancia was held on September 19, 1998. A mass was held aboard the ship as it cruised along the waters of the Burrard Inlet followed by an entertainment program featuring visiting Bicolano tenor Mario Dioneda from San Francisco.

A fund raising for typhoon victims through cash donations, used clothing and dry goods with the assistance of St. Patrick's Parish was conducted by the association. The donations were sent to the Philippines in **Balikbayan** boxes addressed to the Bishops in the Bicol Region. A Youth Member's Dance was held at the Holy Rosary Cathedral Hall on March 13, 1999. The activity, organized by the association's youth delegates to the Victoria Conference was the first social function for children of members and their friends. The association sponsored the first Canadian Concert of Filipino tenor and Bicolano opera singer Mario Dioneda at Christ Church Cathedral in Vancouver. It was the association's contribution in helping promote a cultural presentation with elegance and style featuring a successful Filipino talent.

PBABC sponsored the Welcome Dinner for the new Philippine Consul General, Madame Zenaida

Tacorda-Rabago who hails from the Bicol Region. Some 200 guests representing 29 various community organizations attended the Dinner-Program at Fraser Flamingo Restaurant to meet the very affable and charming Consul General.

Elizabeth Valenciano Cruz was inducted into office for the 2000-2001 term at the Richmond Inn on November 19, 1999. In its first year, Beth's administration has already sponsored several special events including PBABC's participation in the Miracle of Hope Telethon for the BC Children's Hospital spearheaded by Consul General Zenaida-Tacorda Rabago on May 7, 2000 at SFU Auditorium. Beth and other officers worked as volunteers and solicited substantial donations from fellow Bicolanos and friends in the one-hour televised campaign. The association participated in the celebration of **Philippine Festival 2000** along with many other Filipino Canadian organizations at Queens Park Stadium in New Westminster on June 10-11, 2000. PBABC set up an information booth manned by its officers. Bicolano priest, Fr. Manding Abundo celebrated the mass on the second day of the festival.

The first PBABC Invitational Golf Tournament was held with great success at the Mylora Sidaway Golf Course in Richmond on July 30, 2000, coinciding with the association's annual Family Picnic which was attended by 180 Bicolanos and tournament guests. The golf tournament consisted of 19 ladies, 41 men and two male juniors from Vancouver, Toronto, Seattle and Los Angeles. Close to \$1,000 was raised from the event. The annual Penafrancia Festival was held at St. Patrick's Parish on September 7-15 highlighted by a mass procession and dinner on September 16 attended by Bicolanos and friends.

The association's 10th anniversary celebration will be commemorated with an Annual Dinner and Dance at Hilton Vancouver Airport Hotel on November 4, 2000. A special presentation will be made by selected officers and members who will perform the traditional Bicolano folk dance the **Pantomina**.

The Philippine Bicol Association of British Columbia has gone a long way since its formation in 1990 and has made a difference in the lives of its members and beneficiaries. God-willing, the next ten years would be even more fruitful and meaningful to its growing list of members and friends.