

Philippine Independence Day Celebrated by Filipino Texans Statewide

Special to One Philippines

Although spread out in all corners of a state that is geographically bigger than California, Texas Filipinos did not forget the nation's history and the noble legacy left by their national heroes and martyrs. With hearts beaming with patriotic fervor, the major Filipino communities in Texas from North to South Texas, from East to West Texas celebrated the 120th anniversary of Philippine Independence throughout the month of June.

It was on the 12th day in June, 1898, 120 years ago, when Filipino revolutionary forces led by General Emilio Aguinaldo proclaimed the independence of the Filipino people from the balcony of his residence in Kawit, Cavite. The Declaration of Independence was signed by 98 delegates. The National Flag was unfurled for the first time and the Marcha Filipino Magdalo, now our national anthem Lupang Hinirang was first played.

That declaration was never recognized by the United States or Spain. Spain ceded the Philippines to the US in the Treaty of Paris of 1898. After almost 400 years under Spain, the US proceeded to govern the Philippines in the next half-century (except for three years of the Japanese Occupation), until it withdrew and gave the Philippines its independence from the U.S. on July 4, 1946.

The Filipinos celebrated Independence Day on July 4 for many years afterwards, until 1964 when President Diosdado Macapagal, in a true act of national independence, signed Republic Act 4106 designating June 12 as Philippine Independence Day, a sacred event that we have been celebrating every year in all parts of the world. At these celebrations, Filipinos in Texas paid tribute not only to the national heroes of the Philippine revolution, but also to heroes and martyrs of World War II.

In Dallas, a large crowd of Filipinos and special guests gathered in Carrollton on June 12th and celebrated with a ceremonial flag-raising followed by a special program of patriotic speeches, songs and dances. The flag-raising was attended by Mayor Pro-Tem Kim Young of the city of Carrollton who read a Mayor's proclamation. The sponsoring organization was the newly-formed Filipino Leaders Coalition of North Texas (FILCON) led by its new President Myrna Carreon. The event was put together by a Programs Committee led by Edith McCoy, VP for Programs. The venue host is Rev. Pastor Bernard Bassig of the Cosmopolitan Church of Carrollton.



A large crowd attended flag-raising on June 12 in Carrollton



Mabuhay and Pilipinas kong mahal!

In Grand Prairie, a Pista sa Nasyon was held in the Trader's Village and featured different regional cultural folk dancing and singing contributed by the Maharlika Dance Troupe, the Ed Macarangel Dance Company and the Grace Evangelista Hula Dancers. There were singing and talent contests and Filipino food booths.

In Houston, the Filipinos held separate celebrations. One was sponsored on June 10 at the Notre Dame Catholic Church Community Center by the Philippine Cultural Foundation. The group was founded by Juliet Ringer Awitan and is

currently headed by Atty. Fulgencio Duremdes and this year featured a colorful BIBAK indigenous dances from the mountain region. The other was the Kalayaan Gala on June 16th that was hosted by the Filipino American Council of Texas, headed by Belle Datu. Invited guest speaker was Texas senatorial candidate Beto O'Rourke. In the same evening, One Philippines celebrated its 10th year anniversary with a musical extravaganza.

In the Rio Grande Valley, a Filipino Festival was held in the Edinburg City Hall Courtyard under the auspices of the Filipinos' umbrella organization, the "Araw ng Ating Kalayaan" or A.N.A.K. led by its President Marilene Balotro. Major parts of the program were contributed by officers of the Arnulfo Tatoy Foundation, the Sanlahi Dance Troupe, PACC RGV Region, the Jubilee Christian Fellowship, among others. Edinburg Mayor Richard Molina welcomed and paid tribute to the Filipinos in his region and their guests. The highlight of the celebration, which made the entire front page of the regional newspaper the RGV Monitor, was a spectacular fashion show of the regional costumes in the Philippines participated in by the united Filipino community leaders in the region.



Some of the organizers of A.N.A.K. (Araw ng Ating Kalayaan) and Officers of PACC RGV Region



Welcome from Edinburg Mayor Richard Molina



Guest speaker Hon. Consul Ethel R. Mercado sharing the national theme of the 120th Independence Day.

Philippine Honorary Consul Ethel Reyes-Mercado was the keynote speaker. She articulated this year's theme of the worldwide celebration: "Pagbabagong ipinaglaban, handog sa masaganang kinabukasan", translated "Change that we fought for, a gift to a prosperous future." Consul Mercado said that "the theme significantly points to the fact that despite the freedom that we enjoy, efforts to achieve positive changes in our society must be sustained for a brighter tomorrow." She added: "We owe it to the future generation to safeguard and uphold the liberty that we have gained through the selfless efforts and sacrifices of the valiant men and women of our country's history."



Happy 120th Birthday, Inang Bayan! With leaders of Filipino Coalition and Mayor Pro-Tem Young.



Reigning Ms. Philippines And Mrs. Philippines



Colorful Filipino fashion show in the Rio Grande Valley ANAK Independence Day celebration

In San Antonio, the Organization of Filipinos in Texas (San Antonio) led a simple but elegant and very well-attended gala celebration where every part of the program – the singing, the dancing, the poetry and the elocution – had a patriotic flavor to it. The oldest and biggest organization in the city is now headed by millennials, led by President Karen Gonzales and VP Rachel Clark. Live Oak Mayor Mary Dennis opened the celebrations by proclaiming June 12 as Philippine Day in the City of Live Oak.



Organizers of the OFT Independence Day Celebration in San Antonio with leaders of PACC Texas in Houston and Dallas



San Antonio keynote speaker Gus Mercado paying tribute to the gallantry of the Filipino soldiers.

The keynote speaker was Gus Mercado, State Executive Director of the Philippine-American Chamber of Commerce of Texas, now the biggest Fil-Am Chamber in the U.S. and winner of NaFFAA's Alex Esclamado Memorial Award as top Filipino organization in the nation. In his address, Gus reminded the Filipinos of Texas of many things that they should be proud of: San Antonio being not only the prettiest city in Texas but also the most historic. He shared the historical fact that in the 1700's, the lower half of the state used to be called "Nueva Filipinas" or New Philippines, named after King Felipe II of Spain by their earliest Spanish settlers and friars who came to the shores of the region from the Philippines. He wished that the name had not been changed to Texas which is a native Indian name for "friends". Our great state would be called "New Philippines" today.

Gus Mercado also congratulated the Filipinos of San Antonio for having a new mayor who is part-Filipino, Honorable Ron Niremborg. Another distinguished resident of San Antonio is Gina Ortiz Jones, who is running for the U.S. Congress. Gina was represented in the celebration by her Filipina mother, Ms. Vickie Ortiz.



Officers of powerhouse Phil-Am Chambers of Commerce of North Texas, Greater Houston and San Antonio.



Celebration in Plano, Texas with One Philippines Publisher Bhong Sauza and celebrity comedian Ray Kilay.

Author: Gus Mercado. Photography by Gus Mercado, Ricky Guinhawa and Remel Victoriano