

# 2 retirees reach Mt. Apo peak

by CHRISTINA MENDEZ  
Philstar.com

FOR longtime friends Salvador "Yakatay" Sebastian Jr. and Froilan "Froi" Mendez, going out of town every weekend has been a normal activity to stay away from the busy crowd in Metro Manila.

Recently, they went on a mountaineering adventure in Mt. Apo, Kidapawan City.

Marie Fe Geronga-Pame, administrative officer V and acting investment promotions officer of the Office of the Kidapawan City Mayor's Investment Promotions Center, said Sebastian and Mendez are the oldest and second oldest Filipino to reach Mt. Apo's peak.

"As per records, they are the oldest climbers to reach Mt. Apo's peak using the Kidapawan trail. We acknowledge them (having achieved that goal). Actually, I use their experience as example to encourage local and foreign tourists in pursuing their goal to reach the top," Pame said.

Sebastian, a self-employed man from Makati City, is 76 years old while Mendez, a retired government employee, is 65.

They used the Kidapawan City trail, Mandarangan in Barangay Ilimavis in their way to the top, said to be the most difficult of all other trails to Mt. Apo.

"Although they were not able to go back to the same trail, they are the oldest individuals to reach Mt. Apo's peak. They have to use



Sebastian holds his improvised cane amid big rocks he encountered during his climb to Mt. Apo from March 16 to 20, 2009. Philstar photo by Tina Mendez

the emergency trail going down because they told our team that they were exhausted to go back. We accompanied them using the PNOC trail. Nonetheless, their feat are on our records," Pame said.

Pame said the "oldest duo" followed the feat made by a 62-year-old man from Baguio City who was able to reach the peak through the Kidapawan trail and used the same trail on his way back some two years ago.

The duo joins the list of many firsts in Mt. Apo which included the fastest climb (one and a half hours) using the special trail,

a feat by a Canadian ambassador; a young couple who met, got married and had their honeymoon at the peak. The couple also brought their first baby to the peak—making the baby boy the youngest Mt. Apo climber.

In his personal account, Climbing Mt. Apo at its peak, Mendez, recalled the breathtaking and dangerous climb that he and his friend, Yakatay, had last week in the thick forest and steep and slippery slopes of Mt. Apo.

**Highest peak**  
Mt. Apo has a majestic height of 10,311 feet above sea level, the highest peak of the country.

Sebastian said the climb is certainly more than a life's accomplishment of a Filipino adventurer.

"It was really a very difficult climb, even dangerous at that. But all the hardships were worth it. It's really a fulfillment of a long time dream. I am happy that Froi and I fulfilled this dream together," said Sebastian in Filipino.

Both Mendez and Sebastian are not seasoned mountaineers. They are seasoned big motorcycle riders who have become road-trip companions. They also ride

mountain bikes every morning as part of their daily exercises.

Mendez and Sebastian have probably drawn up some sort of "Bucket List" in their minds—sort of things they want to do and achieve while they remain physically strong and able to do so even if they have retired and reached their senior years.

As in the movie, Mendez and Sebastian play the roles Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicolson as they try one by one to accomplish things they want to do before they, so to speak, kick the bucket.

Freeman and Nicolson climbed the pyramids in Egypt. Sebastian and Mendez climbed the highest peak in the country.

Situated in the island of Mindanao, Mt. Apo, the highest mountain in the Philippines and Southeast Asia's second highest, it is known to the natives as kingdom of the mountain god, Apo Sandawa.

A vast area of 72,796 hectares of mossy tropical forest, flowing rivers and streams, waterfalls, exotic flora and fauna is home to the endangered Philippine eagle. It is the centerpoint of the Mt. Apo National Park straddling the provinces of Davao del Sur and North Cotabato.

In their younger years, they rode their big bikes reaching as far as Aparri in the North and various provinces in Mindanao. ■

# Arroyo lauds Nograls' leadership in House

by JOEL GUINTO  
Inquirer.net

PRESIDENT Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo gave a "hats off" to Speaker Prospero Nograls for his "firm leadership" of the House of Representatives.

Arroyo saluted Nograls in a speech before a convention of the Provincial Board Members League of the Philippines at the Apo View Hotel in Davao City. The Speaker was in the audience.

"I would like to greet and give my hats off to Speaker Boy Nograls for his firm leadership of the House of Representatives, and thank you also Boy and other people of Davao City for hosting this very important convention," she said.

Arroyo issued the statement after Nograls said that he would file a resolution that would pave the way for lawmakers to convene themselves into a constituent assembly that would revise the Charter.

The resolution, signed by 175 lawmakers, was drafted by Camarines Sur Representative Luis Villafuerte, president of Arroyo's Kabalikang Malayang Pilipino (Kampi) party.

Talk of Nograls' ouster as Speaker spread after his action to amend the 1987 Charter was perceived as slow.

Arroyo's critics see Charter change as a way for the incumbent to extend her stay in power after her term ends in 2010. ■



Speaker Prospero Nograls

# Melo reiterates plebiscite...

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issue to the Supreme Court if administration congressmen insist on amending the 1987 Constitution without the Senate's participation.

Opposition leader and Makati City Mayor Jejomar Binay warned the Senate not to push through with its plan to bring the issue of Charter change before the Supreme Court, saying senators might fall "into the game plan" of pro-Charter change congressmen.

Rep. Roilo Golez of Parañaque

said even if the Villafuerte resolution is filed, "it's still a long way from passage and approval, not to mention the final hurdle of a Supreme Court challenge."

He said Cha-cha proponents would also have to contend with the "parliament of the streets."

Nograls also said he does not believe reports that presidential son and Pampanga Rep. Juan Miguel Arroyo offered the position of Speaker to former speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. ■

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