

New America Media holds historic meeting with White House

Discusses ways to improve communication with ethnic communities in the US

WASHINGTON—Representatives of New America Media (NAM) recently met with the White House communications office to discuss ways the NAM ethnic media network can be utilized to help deliver important public policy, safety and health information to ethnic communities in the US.

With more than 2,500 members, NAM is the nation's largest organization of ethnic media outlets and organizations. More than 51 million ethnic adults connect to each other, to home countries and to America through the ethnic media, one of the few growing sectors of American journalism.

"We are pleased that the Obama administration was a catalyst for this historic meeting," said Sandy Close, NAM's executive editor and director. "It demonstrates that the White House communications office is serious about ensuring that all Americans receive critical information about policy issues that impact

their lives." Already, NAM has engaged in discussions with some government agencies about utilizing their network as frontline messengers to reach ethnic communities, including those that are non-English speaking. NAM's network of ethnic media partners ranges from the major news outlets serving African-American, Hispanic, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Native American to niche outlets reaching the Burmese and Turkish in Nashville Somali and Hmong in Minneapolis, as well as the Mixtec, Iranian and Rumanian communities in Los Angeles.

NAM and the White House are reviewing ways to better utilize the ethnic media to inform their communities about vital public policies.

Ms. Close noted that NAM will hold their 2009 National Ethnic Media Expo & Awards in Atlanta June 4-5, and will unveil a partnership with a key federal agency that will allow families and individuals in ethnic com-

munities to receive important health-related alerts through ethnic media. "We are looking to expand the news and information that flows from the government and private entities to people living in ethnic communities," Ms. Close said. "Our Expo will help underscore the relevance of the ethnic media, and how it can be better utilized in the future."

Khalil Abdullah, NAM's national editor who attended the White House meeting with Ms. Close, said it's clear that NAM shares similar goals with the Obama administration.

"We live in an information age," Mr. Abdullah said. "It's crucial that ethnic communities receive important information in a language and format that they understand and can utilize to improve their safety, health or quality of life. We must ensure that ethnic communities, especially those that don't speak English, are not left behind and shut out from vital information." (NAM)

Hollywood Presby to hold Philippine Independence Day event on June 6

by RENE VILLAROMAN
AJPress

LOS ANGELES—Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center will mark Philippine Independence Day on June 6 with a 9am flag-raising ceremony and a host of entertainment and cultural activities.

The committee planning the celebration also announced that the celebration would be held on a weekend to allow more employees and their families to attend. The committee also deferred to the suggestion of Director Annie Cuevas and Deputy Director Manny Ilagan of the Philippine Tourism Authority to move the celebration a week earlier than originally set.

Ms. Cuevas and Mr. Ilagan reasoned that by holding the HPMC event on June 6th, their office would be able to participate fully in the preparation and at the event because it would not held at the same time as the 111th Independence Day Ball on June 13 at the Bonaventure Hotel. Errol Santos, HPMC Business Development Consultant and committee chairman, also said that by holding the event on a weekend more HPMC employees and their families would be able to attend.

HPMC's Philippine Indepen-



Errol Santos (left) and HPMC Comptroller Mike Almanzor. AJPress Photo by Rene Villaroman

dence Day celebration last year was considered historic and unprecedented because it was the first time that a Philippine flag was formally raised in a public setting in Los Angeles. Recalling the date, Mike Almanzor, HPMC comptroller, said: "I thought what made it really good was the surprise element since the employees did not know what to expect."

"When we started (the event) there was a lot of negativity," attests Santos. "Things are definitely turning around, and people are getting excited," he told the committee members. "There is a momentum building for this event, and you just have to jump in and make it better."

"Last year there were lots of people, lots of press, and it was so much fun," recalls Mary Jane Tolentino, RN, Director of Nurses of Virgil Convalescent Hospital, one of ten participat-

ing healthcare facilities.

This year the organizers will continue awarding prizes for the best traditional Filipino attire. Last year, the Fil-Ams wearing the best "barong tagalog and Filipiniana gown" received \$500 each in prizes; that contest will be one of the features in this year's event. Other activities planned include cultural and entertainment programs, and guest appearances of celebrities, and attractions for each member of the family, including treats for children. Each participating healthcare facilities will create their own games and contests and award the prizes.

"How can we divide the pie and make your time worthwhile?" asked Santos. "I have to split the pie even, to give every facility an even chance to participate and come up with activities and focus attention to their facilities," Santos said. ■

Philippine couple pleads guilty to smuggling

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Two other defendants in the case, Rodolfo Ebrole Demafeliz Jr., 39, and Rolleta Riazon, 28, both of the Philippines, previously pleaded guilty for conspiracy to bring aliens into the US. The two co-defendants have completed their sentences and have returned to the Philippines, according to the FBI.

"Defendant Pelayo practiced a modern-day form of slavery, coercing employees to work in deplorable conditions for unfair wages," said Loreta King, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "The Civil Rights Division will remain vigilant in finding and prosecuting those who prey on foreign nationals in this manner."

"Using fear and threats of reprisal, the defendants in this case exploited the dreams of foreign nationals who sought a better life in the United States," added US Attorney Thomas P. O'Brien. "Instead of realizing the American dream, the victims in this case were subjected to inhumane treatment that profited only the defendants. For forcing victims to work up to 24 hours a day, everyday, while keeping about half of their meager salaries, Ms. Pelayo is now facing a lengthy prison sentence commensurate with her crimes." Pelayo and Padolina's family declined to comment.

Pelayo and Padolina owned and operated two

elderly homes called Vernon Way Care Home and Walton Care Home in the Long Beach area. The two homes have been shut down since April.

According to the plea agreement filed in federal court, Pelayo admitted that she paid Demafeliz, a Taekwondo instructor, \$6,000 each to smuggle in two undocumented aliens into the US from the Philippines. FBI officials said that Demafeliz would bring the undocumented aliens in as "students" in an American Taekwondo tournament to receive their visas.

The FBI said that the training allegedly added legitimacy to the scheme to obtain the visas.

Pelayo then confiscated their passports, forced them to work at her elder care homes and threatened to turn them over to authorities if they attempted to escape, according to the FBI.

"Today's [Wednesday] guilty pleas are a disturbing reminder that even in today's modern society vestiges of slavery still exist," said Robert Schoch, Special Agent in Charge of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office of Investigations in Los Angeles. "It is a sad reflection on human greed and heartlessness, when individuals believe they can egregiously exploit people from other countries and other cultures."

Pelayo faces a maximum penalty of 25 years in federal prison. Padolina faces a maximum possible penalty of 10 years in prison. (Joseph Pimentel)

Villaraigosa rolls out "Bank on LA"

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Los Angeles hosts one of the largest unbanked populations in the nation—with nearly 300,000 households lacking basic financial tools, like a checking or savings account. As a result, families cannot build up assets for the future; save money for their homes, cars, businesses, and children's education; or develop a strong credit history that enables residents to be full participants in the nation's financial system.

In addition, without a bank

account, Angelenos are forced to use alternative financial services that can cost up to \$1,000 per year - translating into more than \$54 million in check cashing fees and \$88 million in payday loan fees departing homes and communities that need those dollars most.

Immediately following the event, the New America Foundation and the Mayor's Office convened a meeting of community stakeholders, bank representatives, and non-profit leaders to discuss the details of "Bank on LA" and outline

the responsibilities of all parties involved.

Joining Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa at the ceremony were Elise Buik, President and CEO, United Way of Greater Los Angeles; Forescee Hogan-Rowles, President and CEO, Community Financial Resource Center; Matt Fellowes, Director, Pew Safe Banking Opportunities Project, Pew Charitable Trust; and Community members, together with representatives of participating banks, non-profits, and community-based organizations. ■



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