

# OPINION & FEATURES



Pacquiao victorious

AJPress Photo by Joe Cobilla

## Yes, it's a Pacman world

**M**OST would think that after a week, all the hype about Manny "Pacman" Pacquiao knocking out Ricky "The Hitman" Hatton in Las Vegas would die down.

Well, at least a bit. But then again, we could all be wrong—because despite of the A(H1N1) or swine flu virus scare or the continuing downfall of the global economy, people are still talking about Pacquiao. In fact, Filipinos back home were so excited in welcoming the boxing legend that they didn't care if he might be carrying the deadly virus. For them he is still their hero—with or without the flu.

Pacquiao's homecoming was a National Day of Celebration, an event fit for a hero. Aside

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from winning over Hatton, he was also named in *Time Magazine's* 100 Most Influential People list. This is an affirmation of Pacquiao's popularity not only in the ring, but also outside of it.

So we turn our heads and see Pacquiao in many forms—boxing champion, devoted father and loving husband, a singer, a good son and brother, and possibly a politician. But most of all, we see him as a hero to many Filipinos, a role model for those who aspire to be where he is and who he is today. (AJPress)

## Their legacy is in the millions of...



**RHIZOMES**  
Prosy Dela Cruz J.D.

**“**A LEGACY of wars, 40 years down the road should not be excuses on why we should exist with our deficiencies. We can't continue to do the wrong thing and allow colonialism as our excuse. The time for poor leadership and excuses is over.”—Wangari Maathi

I heard Wangari Maathi, a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate on the *Tavis Smiley* show sharing her beliefs on leadership. She was on her book's *The Challenge for Africa tour*. She transformed the plight of Kenyan

women, suffering from lack of cooking fuel, and whose children had become malnourished. She reversed it, by teaching women how to plant trees, which became sources of fuel, for cooking their food. Her efforts paid off big time in not just hundreds, but two million trees planted. She spoke recently of how their Kenyan president can do more to serve the people, if he would simply divest himself of his numerous cars and jets.

In Los Angeles, we are fortunate to have a leader whose legacy is in the million hours of community service, resulting in improved lives of those marginalized and oppressed by injustice.

What Stewart Kwoh created may not be as green as the two million trees planted in Kenya but, his legacy of million-hours in community service, provided to folks over three decades, are depicted in smiles and light-hearted, renewed spirits of numerous men and women. These folks have been empowered by the Asian Pacific American Legal Center which interrupted injustices from plowing down their lives into the abyss of depression and marginalization.

APALC argues its beliefs, in the case (Los Angeles Taxi Workers Alliance Case), “the ability to speak out against injustice, to petition the government for redress, and to demand change from oppressive corporate practices are essential to the work of non-profits.” (APALC Newsletter, Voice of Justice, Spring 2009, Volume 25, Number 1).

Just like Wangari preserved access for Uhuru Park for Kenyan families, instead of a site for a 64-story skyscraper with a large statue for its president, LA-burned communities in post-1992 civil riots are much better planned developments.

In place of hostile environments in high schools are proactive, culturally sensitive leadership development trainings for students and teachers. In place of legal discrimination enshrined in the 1946 Rescission Act, APALC started an awareness campaign organizing the first conference at USC in the 1990's and became part of the citizenship campaign for Filipino World War II veterans in the 1980's. In place of a restricted Applegate Park to Southeast Asians using it for volleyball, facing a potential fine of \$1,000 for playing in Merced, is now a park with more spaces for sports, accessible to more. APALC has helped to move immigrants from the shadow of fear and abuse to continuing their productive work with legal rights and fairer treatment.

Of course, Stewart would be the first to credit the APALC staff: Julie Su, Yungshun Park, Carmina Ocampo, Dan Ichinose, Carmen Morgan, Karin Wang, Justin Ma, Bonnie Tang and now retired staffer, Estelle Chun, as responsible for these improvements.

When APALC's quest for social justice prevails, families transcend their pain, and they become champions of social change and justice for others. The Iletos in their grief turned to advocacy, traveling nationwide to speak against hate crimes, and helped in advocating for the passage of stricter hate crime statutes benefiting other victim-families.

More than transcending pain, it is the sensitivity to languages and cultures that also distinguishes APALC. Already battered by a domestic bully, the immigrant spouse speaks only in their native languages: Tagalog, Mandarin, Fookienese, Vietnamese, Korean, Cambodian, Japanese, Hindi, Thai, isolated, unable to relate to English only-speaking social workers. They turn to APALC for redress and a culturally sensitive lifeline, which allows them to be heard. In the process, the abuser is helped, the family is referred to counseling, and then made whole. Yet, not every family can heal, so referrals to the proper legal authorities become the course of action.

An example was when one of the staff members at a state public agency was battered by her partner APALC was contacted. The

victim felt helpless, unable to work, terrified by spousal threats, and without a safety net from her Pacific Islander community that considered it culturally appropriate for her to endure the abuse.

At her wit's end, she contacted APALC, she was heard, and after her dialogue with Estelle Chun, the state police was contacted, for she worked in a state building, considered to be a part of their jurisdiction. She learned how to protect herself and her children and a process to stop their familial abuse was initiated. While she could not count on her community to keep her safe, her call to APALC enabled her to protect her family.

An organization is only as good as its leader, who embodies the values of what it preaches. As caring as Estelle was and other APALC staffers, so too is Stewart, the head of APALC. He represents the organization at conferences on civil rights, voting rights and leadership development. He shares his vision for a better LA: where each American, even if immigrant, is accorded full dignity and equality under the law. His simple yet profound philosophy of affording each person their deserved dignity defines how he deals with each member of the community.

Yes, Stewart gives you his time, sometimes unhurried, patiently listening, but also mindful of time, particularly if close to dinner, when he politely excuses himself. And with a smile, he says “Pat wants me home for dinner”. His casual sharing conveys how he values family, equally as important as his professional and civic life. Married to Pat, who is a systems manager for an insurance company, together, they have two sons, Nathan and Steven, one studying to be a teacher, and another on his way to be a doctor.

His mother, his role model. When asked who influenced him, he credited his mother, the legendary Beulah Quo (her stage name), who actively gave back to the community. She volunteered for the church she belonged to, and co-founded the East West Players Theater, originally housed in the basement of Bethany Church. Now, this institution has their own building, thanks in part to Beulah, who spent considerable time while on retirement, to cultivate donors to fund its renovation in Little Tokyo, in conjunction with other generous volunteers.

Faced with the racism of her past, Beulah refused to be confined by America's dark periods of exclusion. She herself made no excuses and instead, led her community to help one another. No wonder her death became a tribute to her legacy, and donations to APALC to fund its legal services poured in the thousands, contributed by those who attended her funeral.

Her surviving spouse, Stewart's father, Edwin Kwoh, robust at 93 years old, had graduate degrees in Princeton and Columbia University. He built an import/export business which took him to Taiwan, Japan, Philippines. He too is credited by Stewart as his role model.

Watching both his parents serve the community, inheriting the genes of his mother's strategic visionary capacity, and his father's risk-taking, entrepreneurial spirit, all three factors converged in Stewart to make him a leader with courage, who embraces challenges for APALC to lead and set precedents for others. The end-result: APALC is at a higher level of capacity in coalition—building, areas of legal services, legislative reform, and endowment building. His leadership



Stewart Kwoh with his wife, Pat and his sons, Nathan and Steven.

proved to be prescient, as APALC's reserves provide now a cushion, during this recession, when there are considerably less donations and grants from donors whose wealth has diminished.

Making no excuses, and just like Beulah working with her East West Players' team, Stewart leads with APALC board and staff to raise endowment funds and subsequently acquired the APALC building. Thanks to the donors they cultivated, APALC encouraged them to be part of civil rights advocacy, provision of legal services, and leadership development network. This informs an organizational mission that working families, even if immigrants, are entitled to justice and dignity, as much as others. Much like the garment workers held in slavery in El Monte, much like the Los Angeles taxi drivers, or the aggrieved families victimized by hate crimes, as Vincent Chin's and Joseph Santos Iletto's!

From a humble history of one attorney, in the basement of a church building, APALC was first housed in the First Methodist Church in downtown LA, and now proudly owns its building. It parallels Stewart mother's legacy of co-founding the East West Players theater in the basement of Bethany Church, to now a building in Little Tokyo. From Beulah to Stewart, from Stewart to APALC staff and the community, their million-hours of community service resulted in uplifted lives of families. Unlike the neat landscape of Kenya of two million trees planted by women led by Wangari, the Kwoh's leadership in LA are embodied as permanent legacies in two institutions, first in the East West Players in Little Tokyo, and second in the Asian Pacific American Legal Center in downtown LA, opposite the office of Asian Journal. The torch of well-lived lives in service to others is brightly lit in our Asian American community and continues forward to the next generations of Asian Americans!

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