

Global Campaign for Climate Adaptability Launched

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adaptability, which was initiated by Diaz in 2006, during his year as a Hubert H. Humphrey Fellow in MIT's Special Program for Urban and Regional Studies.

"I feel so blessed to be working with my partners right now, and through this global contest, we hope the best minds in the world will come up with sustainable community projects which we can then replicate, not just in the Philippines, but wherever it is needed," Diaz, lead proponent of the global adaptability challenge, told the *Asian Journal*.

According to the Global Climate Index, the Philippines is one of the ten most afflicted countries in the world in terms of impact in the number of lives and property lost as a result of damage due to climate, and these are mainly in the form of increasing intensities of typhoons visiting the islands annually. This is due mainly to the high vulnerability of rural areas and very little capacity for adaptation (attributed to poverty and lack of awareness on the rising dangers) of the people at risk.

The Designer Villages Challenge will focus on selected climate hotspots in the Philippines, specifically Camarines Sur, a province located in the Bicol region that is frequently devastated by typhoons.

The project aims to bring together local and international architects to find solutions for low-cost residential building designs in the developing world, especially those that constantly face natural disasters like typhoons and earthquakes.

The winning designs of mater plans for low-income communities of 30 houses will each be awarded monetary prizes. The top three village designs will be built by Gawad Kalinga, the largest and most active non-government slum upgrading and rural community builders in Asia. GK will also be using the new blueprint for villages in critically vulnerable areas.

The Manila Observatory, a private non-stock, non-profit, scientific research institution, recently completed a study on the future challenges of climate in the Naga region, which indicate the growing intensity and shifting typhoon pattern to the south of the archipelago (Visayas and Mindanao) with the path affecting thousands of unprepared communities unused to these types of storms.

The study has inspired the building of a redesigned low-income community which will be the new blueprint of how people in the vulnerable coastal and rural areas and cities can successfully cope with impacts of climate variability.

"Because of this shifting typhoon patterns, the need for homes and buildings that are resilient to strong typhoons, winds and heavy rains becomes a bigger priority," Diaz added.

The Challenge
The global Designer Villages Challenge is a powerful collaboration of service and leadership between Gawad Kalinga and MyShelter Foundation in a bid to provide innovative housing and community solutions

that empower people and are adaptive to the present challenges of climate change.

In January of this year, the Philippines' largest low-cost community builders, Gawad Kalinga, mounted a local design competition, challenging senior architecture and interior design students to raise the bar of excellence for GK communities around the country and the world by harnessing their talents and skills into building the most beautiful, environment-friendly and sustainable GK villages for the poorest of the poor who otherwise cannot afford their services. May 8, 2009 was the last day of submission of entries and awarding will be in September of this year.

Similarly and exactly the year before, MyShelter Foundation together with its partners, Gov. LRay Villafuerte, the National Disaster Coordinating Council, the Private Sector Disaster Management Network and the United Architects of the Philippines mounted an international competition with the vision of culling emergent technologies from the world's architects who can create sustainable new design solutions for schools to improve the overall learning conditions of the children, and to revolutionize the blueprint in making the structure resilient to strong and typhoons.

The winning design is a sustainable bamboo school by Eleena Jamil of Malaysia which began construction at the Nato Elementary School in Camarines Sur last May 15, 2009. This was the first phase of the project, and organizers now intend to build one of the largest bamboo schools in the world.

This year, these two engines for changing architecture for low-income communities—one for better sustainable design and one for disaster resiliency—have come together through a competition platform to find solutions to the problem of obsolete, low-cost residential building designs in the developing world in the midst of climate change.

Organizers hope that a broader international network base will bring in around 2,000 design entries to complete a full master plan of a climate resilient community for rural areas of the country. The scope of the design will be based on master planning a low-income community of 30 houses based on affordability (\$2,000 USD), typhoon and earthquake resistance, sustainable development, innovative construction technology, scalability and flexibility of use.

This project is in honor of the 90th year anniversary of the Fulbright Program and the 30th year anniversary of the Hubert Humphrey Program. The Fulbright Program promotes leaders who unite the world through a dialogue of peace and understanding through educational exchange.

Allan E. Goodman, President, Institute of International Education (IIE) joined Consul General Cecilia B. Rebong, Tony Meloto of Gawad Kalinga, and Ilac Diaz at the press launch of the competition. For more details about the competition, visit www.philippineclimatechallenge.org.

Ten outstanding Filipinos honored...

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"Singing Ako Ay Pilipino", performers from the Filipiniana Cultural & Arts Foundation lead awardees and the audience in celebrating being Filipino in the first gala night commemorating Philippine Independence Day, held at the Treasure Island Hotel in Las Vegas.



Martin Celemin (far left) and Luz Micabalo (far right) present NaFFAA service awards for contributions to the Filipino American community to (L-R): Elena Brady, Dr. Benito Calderon, Luzviminda Banaria RN, Jing Espiritu, Noel Casimiro, Judge Cheryl Nora Moss, Rozita Lee, Violeta Horn, Myrna Alforque, Belen Gabato RN, and Francesca Aroc Ridgley. AJPress photos by Robert Macabagdal

NaFFAA.

Lee, the national vice chair of NaFFAA, was lauded for creating awareness of Filipino and Asian culture through the television shows that she produced in Las Vegas. Only last May, Lee was also recognized by Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman for her efforts in promoting the welfare of Filipinos and Filipino-Americans throughout the United States.

Espiritu and Casimiro, meanwhile, hold the NaFFAA Nevada state chair and vice state chair respectively. Their recent efforts resulted in the biggest Philippine Independence Day celebration in Las Vegas, where close to 5,000 Filipinos attended.

Three other Filipinos were recognized for their professional achievements in Las Vegas. Elena Brady had been appointed

by NV Gov Jim Gibbons as member of the state's office of minority health advisory board. Belen Gabato is the first Asian member of the NV State Board of Nursing. Educator Francesca Aroc Ridgley, meanwhile, was lauded for her contribution in the field of education.

Medical professionals Dr. Benito Calderon and Luzviminda Banaria were lauded for their charitable

involvement in the healthcare of Filipinos in the city. Dr. Calderon is popular for being the physician of the "uninsured"—or those who do not have medical insurance. Banaria, a registered nurse, helped set up the Las Vegas Philippine Medical Mission, a non-profit agency that organizes medical missions to indigent communities in the Philippines.

Other awardees who were recognized last June 20th were Myrna Alforque and Violeta Horn. Alforque is the founder of the Filipiniana Cultural & Arts Foundation, a gathering of men and women who perform traditional Philippine folk dances both at Filipino and mainstream gatherings in Las Vegas.

Horn, a CPA by profession, is a member of the board of trustees of The Lions HealthFirst Foundation. The charity maintains a preventive screening program that aims to reduce the rate of stroke, heart attacks and cancer among people.

Meanwhile, a posthumous award was given to Dr. Rena Nora for her contribution to the medical field in Las Vegas. The award was received by her daughter Las Vegas Family Court Judge Cheryl Nora Moss.

All the awardees were given the recognition during the first-ever red carpet event for Filipinos in this city. The gala event is part of the first annual Fiesta Filipino festivities in this city.

The 2009 Fiesta Filipino festivity in Las Vegas has been the biggest celebration in this city to commemorate the 111th Independence Day of the Philippines. The Philippines marks its Independence Day on June 12th. NaFFAA NV aims to hold the Las Vegas event annually every month of June. ■



“It's a great feeling to be with my family every time I perform in the US. Salamat po sa visa ko at visa ng buong pamilya ko. You are really the best!”

Sarah Geronimo
SINGER/ACTRESS

Immigration agency says backlog virtually gone

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routine checks for possible criminal backgrounds and national security questions. But now, nearly all name check requests submitted to the FBI are being answered within 30 days. The remaining 2 percent are finished within 90 days, USCIS officials said.

"The FBI has made great strides... and shown it's capable of sustaining that service level," Michael Aytes, acting deputy director of Citizenship and Immigration Services said.

Petitions that require more evaluation or interaction with other agencies are not included in the FBI name check backlog count, immigration officials said. Currently, some 6,000 cases are pending with Citizenship and Immigration Services, including some in which the application was filed several years ago, Aytes said.

"They are being looked at, they don't just sit on a shelf," said Gregory Smith, the agency's assistant director for national security and records verification directorate.

The volume of pending FBI name checks peaked in November 2007 when there were about 350,000 pending cases. At the time, more than half had been waiting for more than three months and a large number had been pending for more than a year, Aytes said.

In April 2008, the two agencies established milestones and priorities for the name checks. The goals required processing all name checks pending more than three years by May 2008, those pending more than two years by July 2008, and requests pending more than one year by November 2008.

A government audit issued in June 2008 found the FBI had been using old technology and workers without enough training to do security checks.

That same month, a group of Muslim immigrants seeking US citizenship in Missouri filed a federal class-action lawsuit claiming they had been made to wait for months or years because of slow background checks. (AP)

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