

*The Visayan Century:*  
**CELEBRATING A HUNDRED YEARS OF  
THE VISAYAN PRESENCE IN HAWAII**  
**By Jun Colmenares**

Filipinos of Visayan ancestry in Hawaii kicked-off their centennial anniversary celebration this year last January 18, 2009 with the Santo Nino Fiesta held at the Wailuku Community Center in Maui. More than 600 people attended the event which was highlighted by a Sinulog procession, a Catholic mass, dinner, a gubernatorial proclamation, and entertainment. Visayans from Honolulu, the Big Island, and Lanai participated in the festivities. A resounding success, the Santo Nino festival will be followed by other centennial events statewide organized by the Congress of Visayan Organizations (COVO), in collaboration with other community groups.

The First Visayans in Hawaii

Records from the State Archives show that the first Visayan sakadas arrived in Honolulu, Hawaii on July 20, 1909, aboard the s.s. Korea. There were forty five of them, including men, women and children. They included the first Visayan families in Hawaii – the Magpiong and the Yorong families – whose descendants still live in the islands.

This first group of Visayan sakadas originated mostly from Cebu and Siquijor Islands. They were followed by subsequent groups totaling more than 600 for the year 1909 alone. They were assigned to the Kahuku Plantation on Oahu's North Shore. Subsequent arrivals were assigned to other plantations on Oahu, Kauai, and the Big Island.

From 1909 to the mid-1920s, most of the sakadas who were recruited from the Philippines came from the Visayan islands, thereby making them the largest Filipino group in Hawaii. Recruitment of Visayans started going down after the mid-1920s for several possible reasons: (1) they were actively involved in the unions and organized or participated in several labor strikes, the highlight of which was the death of several Visayan strikers in the infamous Hanapape Massacre of 1924 in Kauai. This did not sit well with the HSPA who decided to recruit what they considered as more "docile" Filipino groups rather than the Visayan "troublemakers"; and (2) at this time, the Philippine government was encouraging Filipinos from the north and central part of the country to settle in Mindanao, and most Visayan immigrants decided to go to nearby Mindanao rather than to the far-flung Hawaiian islands. By the time recruitment from the Philippines ended in 1946, the Visayans have become a small minority within the Filipino community. Presently, they constitute around 10-15% of the Filipino population in Hawaii.

Visayan Contributions

Despite their number, Filipinos of Visayan ancestry have made their mark in various fields of endeavor in Hawaii. Mention could be made of former governor Benjamin Cayetano, former Senate president Robert Bunda, Honolulu City Council chair Rudolph Pacarro, Ambassador Juan Dionisio, former state representative Bernaldo Bicoy, labor organizers Epifanio Taok and Tommy Tomimbang, well known TV personality Emme Tomimbang, world boxing champion Ben Villaflor, Filipino martial arts grandmasters Largusa and Villabrille, educator Dr. Ben Junasa, humanitarian Fr. Jaime Neri, social activist Mila Medallon, malaria researcher Dr. Sandra Chang, well-known cardiologist Dr. Danelo Canete, actress Tia Carrere, singers Jun Polistico and Kristian Lei, and many others. And there was the intrepid Florentino Das, who electrified the world in 1954 when he sailed from Hawaii to the Philippines in a small, home-made, wooden boat, guided only by the stars.

Visayans also boast of the oldest active Filipino community organization – the Balaan Catalina Society – which was founded in 1929, and what can be considered as the first Filipino community center in Hawaii – the United Visayan Community club house in Waipahu which was erected in the 1950s.

There are thus many things that Visayans in Hawaii can be proud of, thereby making this centennial year worthy of commemoration.

#### Visayan Centennial Events

The Congress of Visayan Organizations (COVO), the statewide umbrella of Visayan organizations in Hawaii, is leading the way in organizing various events to celebrate the Visayan centennial, or what they call as “the Visayan Century.” The following is a tentative list of the major activities for the whole year:

1. Santo Nino Fiesta, January 18, 2009, Kahului, Maui (kick-off event)
2. Congress of Visayan Organizations (COVO) 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, February 8, 2009, Philippine Consulate, Honolulu
3. Visayan Centennial float and cultural display booths, Filipino Fiesta and Parade, May 9, 2009, Honolulu
4. Visayan Centennial Tour (Davao, Cebu, Bohol and Dumaguete), May 16-June 2, 2009, Philippines
5. Visayan Century Awards Gala, July 19, 2009, Hale Koa Hotel, Honolulu
6. Balaan Catalina Society 79<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, July 25, 2009, Honolulu
7. Visayan Centennial Fiesta, July 25, 2009, Lanai.

8. COVO Statewide Convention and Centennial Gala, August 15-16, 2009, Kona, Big Island
9. Adopt-A-School Youth Development Project (with Filipino Jaycees), October 11, 2009, Filipino Community Center
10. 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration of Gen. MacArthur's Landing in Leyte (Liberation of the Philippines), October 17, 2009, (with Veterans of Foreign Wars), Honolulu
11. Visayan Centennial Celebration, October 24, 2009, Kauai
12. Visayan Centennial Exhibit, October-December 2009, UH Hamilton Library, Honolulu
13. Community Forum on the Visayans of Hawaii, November 21, 2009 (with UH Center for Philippine Studies), Honolulu
14. Publication of book "Handumanan: The Visayan Century in Hawaii" (a collection of stories and pictures of the Visayan experience in Hawaii), December 2009

For more information about the Visayan Centennial activities, or to join the Visayan Centennial Tour to the Philippines, please contact Dayday Hopkins at [dayday@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:dayday@hawaii.rr.com), or Jun Colmenares at [juncolme@yahoo.com](mailto:juncolme@yahoo.com).