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Filipino-American Association of Greater Columbia, South Carolina



Sense of Belonging: FAAGC reaches out to South Carolina Filipinos. (Front row, l-r): Helen Alon, Cecille Geoghegan, Imelda Go. (Middle row, l-r): Edith Alston, Grace Collins, FAAGC President, Lulu Anderson, Pete Liunoras, Polly Pearson, Alan Matienzo, Sunny Burroughs. (Back row, l-r): Walter Gantt, Alan Geoghegan, FAAGC Vice-President.

NOEL ALON

Pinoy Pride Lives On By Alan Geoghegan

A very gratifying aspect of being closely involved with the Filipino-American Association of Greater Columbia, South Carolina (FAAGC) is the challenge of reaching the Fil-Am community families and keeping them involved in our activities. There are 6,423 Filipinos in South Carolina according to the 2000 U.S. Census. Currently, FAAGC has about 120 family memberships, with 20 families having been members continuously since 1991.

FAAGC was formally organized on June 9, 1991, when Mt. Pinatubo erupted. We had our first fundraiser that benefited an orphanage in Angeles City. Last October, we held our 14th Annual Gala to help raise needed money for the association's scholarship fund and our dream of having a Fil-Am cultural center.

A nonprofit, all-volunteer organization, FAAGC aims to promote the Philippine cultural heritage, to foster intercultural education and understanding, and to provide charitable assistance when needed. It is administered by a 12-member Executive Board composed of elected officers who serve a 2-year term.

Three FAAGC presidents (Nieves McNulty, Peter Liunoras, Grace Collins) and two members (Francisco Sy and Noel Alon) have all received awards for their community service in South Carolina.

FAAGC has a cultural dance troupe, a newsletter (being archived for posterity by the University of South Carolina's Caroliniana Library), a speakers' bureau, and educational exhibits displaying Philippine culture and history. Each year, we have our formal gala, a Christmas party, an Easter picnic and regular membership meetings for the public, in addition to various fund raising activities.

"The inspiration for me to join our FilAm group has to do with the Filipino term "samahan" (unity). When I go to a Filipino gathering, it is like taking a little trip back home; not only do we enjoy the food but we also want to remember our culture. We love the Filipino lifestyle; this is the love for celebration and desire to enjoy life. Our parents taught us to always be thankful to God and share what we have with others. We show this through gatherings and fun filled activities," says member Charles Goyeneche.

"The biggest motivation is for the Filipino-American children who were born here - we want them to know about and to appreciate their cultural heritage. Hopefully this will help them understand who they are," adds former FAAGC president Nieves McNulty.

In 1993 and 1999 FAAGC collaborated with Hiyas-Min (the Philippine Cultural Society of Charleston, SC), to present the "Karilagan (Beauty)" and "Kalayaan (Cry for Freedom)" cultural showcases. In 1997 it sponsored the stage presentation "The Philippines: Yesterday, Today and Forever" performed by the Manila-based, world-touring Philippine Centennial Youth Delegation. In 1998 FAAGC's own Columbia Fil-Am Cultural Dance Troupe served as the opening act for the West Coast recording group Pinay in a first-of-its-kind cultural showcase/concert in the southeast. In 2001 the organization co-hosted a post-performance reception for the Bayanihan, the world-renowned Philippine National Dance Company, after its cultural show here.

Together with around 20 Fil-Am related organizations

and groups in the state, FAAGC has brought Filipiniana into South Carolina.

"The sense of belonging keeps me inspired to be with Fil-Ams. It is in this social group that I can express my 'Filipino-ness.' When I see another Filipino on the street, in the malls, or wherever, I feel a connection almost immediately," says Eva Rigney, FAAGC's first president.

McNulty notes, "as long as FAAGC continues to hold activities and opportunities for the young people to experience all that is good about Filipino life, then I think we are going in the right direction."

Future plans for the organization include increasing its membership, improving the quality and quantity of the Fil-Am dance troupe so youth members can have the opportunity to practice and perform, coordinating and collaborating with other Fil-Am organizations and solidifying plans for a cultural center in Columbia, South Carolina (so far, FAAGC has raised \$12,000).

Alan Geoghegan was born in the Philippines, raised in New York and moved from Manila to South Carolina in 1997. He is currently Vice President of the FAAGC. ♦