

Filipino community shares culture with Gallup

Written by By Andy Gibbons III Sun Correspondent
Friday, 26 August 2016 02:28



Fun-loving Filipino Cultural Extravaganza benefits RMCHCS

Recently, headlines were made because of alleged disparaging comments about Filipino teachers made by Sandra Jeff, the newest Board of Education member for Gallup-McKinley County Schools. Last week, the Sun reported on the heated Aug. 15 school-board meeting and the large turnout by the Filipino community.

Jeff reportedly told an area media group in a July 28 story that teachers who hail from the Philippines don't speak English "as well as they should." The commentary featured more alleged stinging comments, with Jeff supposedly asserting that Filipino teachers were merely foreign exchange students.

In response, the Filipinos, including teachers and local professionals, showed up to the school-board meeting en masse to show their solidarity as a community.

Local physician Dr. Christopher Gonzaga, a Filipino himself, gave a memorable speech on behalf of the Filipino community.

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"It's kind of funny, because I was already planning on speaking about the Filipino community for another reason entirely," he said.

Gonzaga is an honoree of this year's Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services Charity Invitational, and he and his wife want to share that honor with other community workers who have Filipino backgrounds.

In partnership with RMCHCS, an Aug. 26 Filipino Cultural Extravaganza event, from 6 -7 pm at JFK Middle School Auditorium at 600 Boardman Dr., benefits the charity, with the aim of building a community wellness center for Gallup.

The event is a celebration of Filipino culture, with live music, dancing, and food.

"We are a fun-loving community," Gonzaga said, and the community wants to share this fun with other locals, all for a good cause.

Irene Fuller, a math teacher at Miyamura High School, says she is excited about the event. She's one of many Filipino teachers to have spread the word about the extravaganza. Fuller is also disenchanted by Jeff's previous comments to the media about Filipino teachers.

"None of us came from an exchange program," Fuller said. "In fact, most of us have master's degrees and have level II or III licenses with multiple endorsements."

Fuller originally heard about attending the school-board meeting from Filipino friends on Facebook, where the invitation was extended to show that Filipinos are united as a community. Many felt they had been victims of discrimination because of Jeff's comments.

But looking forward, the overall perspective seems positive for many Filipino community

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leaders. Gonzaga in particular sees the Filipino Cultural Extravaganza event as an opportunity for those in the community who are unfamiliar with Filipino culture to better understand and appreciate all it has to offer.

For information about the Aug. 26 event, contact: Monica Greene at (505) 863-7282.

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