

# Filipino American HERALD

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## Community News...

### Pagdiriwang, Seattle's annual showcase of Filipino-American culture, celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Every year, on the second weekend of June, Filipino-Americans gather at the Seattle Center for Pagdiriwang, one of the largest and longest-running annual celebrations of Filipino culture, history and heritage in the Northwest. This year, the event marks its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The theme for this year's festivities is "Independence: Freedom Fought, Freedom Earned." The theme partly refers to the fact that the festival coincides with the Philippines' Independence Day celebrations. But the festival is also paying direct tribute to the Filipino veterans of World War II, and their six-decade-long struggle to gain the full veteran's benefits promised before the war by the United States, and then later taken away.

The issue has galvanized and united Filipino-Americans, who are now the largest Asian-American group in the state, and the second largest in the nation. Several bills are winding their way through both houses of Congress to right the historical wrong, and there is renewed hope that this year, the Democratic-led Congress will be able to restore full veterans equity to the elderly Filipino veterans.

At the festival, Benito Valdez and Julian Nicolas, survivors of a 1945 raid to free 500 U.S. soldiers from a Japanese prisoner of war camp, will be honored. The successful liberation of American prisoners, in which Filipino soldiers played a crucial role, was recently memorialized in the 2005 film "The Great Raid." The veterans' fight for full equity is also

center stage at the Pagdiriwang Film Festival, which will feature a documentary on the topic.

"I think this is going to be our best year yet," said Flori Montano, the founder of Pagdiriwang and at 80, still the driving force behind the festival. Each year, she manages to bring together the diverse, and often divergent, strands of the Filipino-American community, into a harmonious whole.

The broad range of Filipino-American culture showcased at the festival is what truly distinguishes Pagdiriwang from other cultural celebrations. Over the course of one weekend, through its extensive line-up of entertainment programs and exhibits, Pagdiriwang offers a rich, immersion course on Filipino-America.

Among the highlights of this year's Pagdiriwang:

**Opening Ceremonies** - Presiding over the Gala Opening Ceremony, which will formally kick off the festivities on Saturday, are Ellen Abellera, the executive director of the state Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (CAPAA), and her husband Ed Abellera.

Among the invited guests are Gov. Christine Gregoire and First Gentleman, Mike Gregoire. Ambassador Willy Gaa has been invited to do the "Toast to Freedom" with Gov. Gregoire. Seattle City Councilman David Della, the first Filipino-American man elected to the City Council, also has been invited to participate in the opening ceremony, along with World War II veterans Benito Valdez and Julian Nicolas, and

Seattle Center Director Robert Nellans.

**Philippine Art Exhibit** - A traveling exhibit of new works by the Five Strokes - Grandier Gil C. Bella, Mary Jane C. dela Paz, Jose G. Evangelista, Norlito P. Meimban, and Raul M. Roco, Jr. - professional artists from the Philippine art scene. Works by local Filipino American artists, including metal artist Weng Gavino and painter Olivia Zapata, will also be featured. The exhibit will have an opening gala at 6 p.m. Friday, June 8 at the Center House. Most of the artists will be attending and Seattle Center Director Robert Nellans will give a welcoming address.

**Words Expressed: Pinoy Playfest** - Performances of works by Filipino-American playwrights, including Stan Asis, Trinidad Rojo, Nancy Calos-Nakano, Robert Flor, Tini Bajado and Pinay sa Seattle.

**Health Fair** - The Filipino-American Physicians of Washington and the Filipino-American Nurses and Health Professionals will hold their popular health fair, offering free consultations and health screenings.

**Little Royalty Pageant and Ballroom Dance** - A Saturday night coronation ceremony to crown the festival royalty, followed by ballroom dancing late into the night.

**Fil Am Jam "Diwa Ng Kalayaan" Hip-Hop Showcase** - A talent showcase of hip hop performances will be featured at the Mural Amphitheater. The talent line-up includes DJ Daps 1 (Fil-Am Arts Collective), Rogue

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### Five Strokes

From left: Jes Evangelista, Grandier Bella, Norlito Meimban, Jane dela Paz, Raul Roco, Jr.

### Pagdiriwang continued

Pinay (Pinay sa Seattle), Prometheus Brown (of the Blue Scholars and Fil-Am Arts Collective), Angela Martinez Dy; El Dia, Youth Speaks Seattle)

**Folk Songs and Dances and Musical Showcase** - A wide selection of musical talent will also be featured at Center Stage throughout the festival, including the Barangay Chorale Group, Young Once (IDIC), Auburn Dance Troupe, Filipino American Youth Organization (BAYO) of Tacoma, Simbang Gabi Choral Group St. Elizabeth Seton in Mill Creek.

**Pagdiriwang Film Festival** - Aside from an hour-long documentary on Filipino veterans, there will also be a screening of a 30-minute film on the Pinay Sa Seattle, an all women's hip-hop showcase.

**Literary Musical Contest** - Contestants in a competition coordinated by the Filipino American Educators of Washington will perform their winning entries. The contest, which was open to students in K-12, had several categories, including vocal performances in Tagalog or a Philippine dialect, and dramatic interpretations of a Filipino literary work.

**A Celebration of Excellence in Education** - A Pagdiriwang tradition returns as FAEW (Filipino American Educators of Washington) honors this year's high school graduates for their accomplishments in academics, leadership,

special talents and community service. FAEW will also announce scholarship winners and give out an Educator of the Year Award and a Distinguished Service Award to a retired educator.

**Palaro** - Children will have an opportunity to learn traditional Filipino games. There will also be a Dama (Filipino chess) tournament for older players.

**Cultural Activities for Children** - Craft activities and cultural and educational games will also be held throughout the festival.

**A Culinary Fair** - Interesting culinary displays and Philippine table arts exhibits by cookbook author Violet Noriega have delighted festival goers over the years. This year, the displays will feature creative food garnishes.

**Martial Arts Workshop** - Demonstrations of eskrima and arnis (traditional Filipino martial arts), will be conducted by national Filipino martial arts masters in a workshop coordinated by instructor Peter Israel.

**Food Booths and Vendors** - Filipino food and Filipino-themed products will be sold by local businesses.

Pagdiriwang will be from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday, June 9, and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday, June 10, at the Center House in the Seattle Center. It is expected to draw 10,000 people and is free and open to anyone interested in experiencing all things Filipino.