

# **INTERNATIONAL EXPOFEST 2002—Bringing Asia to Miami and America to Asian Americans**

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By: Nick Vicera

MIAMI – On June 1 & 2, 2002, the Miami Arena, the once rowdy home court of the NBA Miami Heat, became the turf of the Asian American Community of South Florida. The thundering sounds of Japanese, Korean, and Polynesian traditional drums dominated the halls of the arena, instead of the usual raucous cheering, common during NBA games. The center court that once belonged to basketball greats like Alonzo Mourning and Tim Hardaway was taken over by courtly and exotic Asian, Polynesian and Muslim folk dancers. The food court that sold American fast foods became a show stand of oriental foods and delicacies. The arena that once took pride in hosting the fiery rivalry between the Miami Heat and New York Knicks became a homely courtyard of Asian civility, culture and commerce.

“The East visits West”, said Mike Gozon, the newly appointed administrator of NANAY, the prime organizer of the event, of the two-day 2002 International ExpoFest. “In this event, we brought the entirety of what we, Asian Americans, can offer to South Florida in terms of our culture, trade, commerce, tourism, cuisine, and even medicines,” he continued. “In this same event, we also looked at the social variables of the other side of the equation, that is how, we Asian Americans can integrate ourselves more quickly to the mainstream of the American way of life, in terms of knowing more about local and federal governments and their social services, of promoting civic awareness among ourselves, and of introducing the educational system of this country most appropriate to the needs of new Asian immigrants,” Gozon continued.



Participation in the ExpoFest was Asian community wide. The diversity of Asian ethnicity was made alive by the participation of Asian Pacific, East Indian, Far Eastern and Southeastern Asian participants. There was a kaleidoscopic display of Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and

Thai handicrafts and art pieces, and Chinese and Korean alternative medicines, like herbal medicines and massage therapies. There were a variety of Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Laotian, Thai, and Vietnamese foods, sizzling and always ready to satisfy anybody's eager taste buds. Cultural entertainment crossed ethnic boundaries offering a mixed revue of Asian folklore and drama – Chinese acrobats, Filipino folk dances, Korean and Japanese drummers, Muslim dances, and Polynesian hulas.

On the other end of the arena lobby, were the local American participants, invited to provide Asian immigrants with information on how to familiarize themselves with the reality of living in America. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and the Social Security Administration (SSA) provided visitors with wide-ranging literatures of their services to facilitate their transition to the dynamics of the American way of life. Admission counselors of local vocational and technical colleges, like the Keiser College and Miami-Dade Community College, set up desks to invite new immigrants to their short-term curriculum as ways of easing their entry to the domestic labor market. Retirement homes and health insurance companies also set up booths to advise seniors of their services and programs for the elderly, a concept of service still novel to Asian families in the care of their elders.



“Citizenship must be exercised with a willing and voluntary discharge of civic services,” said Bennie Trinidad, NANAY vice president and overall coordinator of the ExpoFest. “One long-term objective of our program is to encourage Asian Americans to involve themselves more in community work and render civic duties to their new country, the U.S., in private capacity, like performing services for the Peace Corps and Americorps, the country’s leading endorsers of volunteerism and volunteer work, and it is one reason why we are inviting these organizations in our ExpoFest,” he continued.

“The Filipino American participation in the ExpoFest was outstanding,” said Ted Ravelo, president of the Filipino Community Association of Florida. Cielo Martinez, the New Orleans-based Philippine honorary consult general, set up the Philippine Consulate on Wheels in cooperation with the Filipino American Ministries of Dr. Marion Faldas. The local chapter of the

Philippine Nurses Association of South Florida (PNASF) headed by Helen Kranzel, joined the Broward-based Urgent Care and Doctors Plus Medical Center headed by Dr. Antonio Wong, and offered free-of-charge blood pressure and sugar-level screenings to visitors. The Philippine American Federation of South Florida headed by Nida Winnett set up the Filipiniana exhibit showcasing consummate Filipino artistry. The Pampanguena Store occupied a food stall to introduce Filipino foods to the visitors.

“This ExpoFest is Asia in a nutshell.” Said Dr. Joy Bruce, NANAY’s president. “We pool together the talents and know-how of all Asian Americans in the area, and match them with the resources available outside of our ethnic groups, to determine our potentials of becoming productive partners in defining and shaping the increasingly diverse ethnic and cultural landscape of South Florida,” she continued. “There is a growing aggressiveness within our Asian American community to promote Asian American agenda and this event is one pioneering step to advancing that initiative,” Bruce added.

Note: This event partly subsidized by prime sponsors like Washington Mutual, Law Offices of John Gaudiosi, and Doctors Plus Medical Center. Dr. Zachariah P. Zachariah, Chairman of the Florida Board of Medicine, Director of Cardiology at Holy Cross Hospital, and President-appointed Commissioner for White House Initiative on the Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, will serve as Honorary Chair.

Nick Vicera is Publisher and Editor of “The Filipino American”, a publication of the Filipino American Community of South Florida.