

Remembering the Leadership
of Filipino Farmworkers
in the 1965 Delano Grape Strike:
A Memorial to their Dedication and Legacy

Presented by the Filipino Memorial Project

April 25, 2011

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I. Executive Summary

This proposal recommends for the Milpitas Public Art Committee to allow the Filipino Memorial Project (FMP) to install a mural at either the Milpitas Community Library (first preference), one of the thirty-one Milpitas Community Parks (second preference), or any other sites the Committee might recommend. The mural intends to commemorate Larry Itliong, Pete Velasco, Philip Vera Cruz, Andy Imutan, Ben Gines, Pete Manuel, the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), and the 1500 predominantly Filipino farmworkers who walked off the fields of Delano on September 8, 1965.

Demanding better work conditions in the grape fields of California, Filipinos boldly forged an alliance with Cesar Chavez and the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA). Eventually coalescing into the United Farm Workers (UFW), Filipinos and Mexicans succeeded in a higher wage increase and won the right to collective bargaining through the passage of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act.

Despite their catalytic initiation of the Delano Grape Strike, Larry Itliong, Philip Vera Cruz, Pete Velasco, Pete Manuel, Ben Gines and Andy Imutan are rarely noted for their integral involvement in American labor organizing history. Along with Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, these six men inspired the formation of the United Farm Workers. As the City of Milpitas continues to serve its diversified resident population, we ask the Public Art Committee to assist us in increasing the public profile of this historical event. Weaving in this forgotten history will only strengthen the historical and social connections across our diverse communities.

In this proposal, we will first describe our organization, our mission, core values, organizational structure and project team. Second, we will provide a synopsis of the Filipino American community in Milpitas, as well as an overview of the history of Filipino Americans in Santa Clara County and their role in the farmworker movement of the 1960s. Lastly, we will describe our financial plan to fund the project through private donations so that it is not a financial burden on the City.

II. The Organization

The Filipino Memorial Project is an organization founded at San Jose State University (SJSU) that began as a collaboration between Dr. Estella Habal, a Filipino American professor of Interdisciplinary Social Science; and Akbayan, a Filipino American collegiate organization.

The idea for the Project stemmed from Dr. Habal's Filipino American Experience Class in the spring of 2008, wherein Filipino students (many of whom were Akbayan members) realized the lack of public awareness about the contributions of Filipinos to the Farmworker movement. The Project garnered support from student leaders and faculty across SJSU, De Anza College, and UC Santa Cruz; working professionals of

corporations and non-profit organizations; as well as community members at large.

From a fledgling group of a few individuals, we have grown into an organization of 50 members. We are now a Project led primarily by Filipino American community members throughout Silicon Valley, fiscally sponsored by the non-profit Manilatown Heritage Foundation (based in San Francisco, California).

A. Mission

As a local collective of professors, historians, students, and community members, we seek to educate the public about the contributions Filipinos have made in California and the United States at large. We are dedicated to establishing historical, cultural and artistic representations of Filipino history in Santa Clara County.

B. Core Values:

Our core values drive our spirit of volunteerism in sharing the rich history of Filipino Americans in the form of visual representations throughout Santa Clara County.

1. Civic Engagement - FMP recognizes the need for Filipino American representation and participation in Santa Clara County. Together, we strive to work collaboratively with individuals within our organization and other communities to foster strong service relationships, cultural awareness, political participation and advocacy.

2. Embrace Diversity - FMP seeks to reinforce cultural awareness of the multiple communities and heritages that make up Santa Clara County. Through the installation of visual representations, we aim to provide education and generate meaningful dialogue with the larger community.

3. Historical Preservation - FMP is dedicated to increasing public awareness through the installation of a continuum of Filipino American historical markers that will transform and rejuvenate Santa Clara County.

4. Youth Empowerment - FMP is particularly concerned with cultivating and maintaining historical knowledge and social consciousness among Filipino American youth. The hope is to help build varied references of ethnic identity, a grounded sense of belonging, and self-empowerment for the youth, for generations to come.

C. Organizational Structure

FMP gathers monthly to discuss the progress of our projects. With the guidance of an Advisory Board, we are organized into 4 working committees: Public Relations,

Fundraising, Design and Education. Key volunteers lead each committee.

1. Advisory Board – Made up of seasoned veterans in the field of civic engagement, who have dedicated decades of their lives to the betterment and advancement of their community members.

2. Public Relations – Increases the visibility of our projects to key stakeholders such as local government offices, Filipino American organizations, and faith-based groups.

3. Fundraising Committee – Garners financial support through three main ventures: fundraising event programming/coordination, donation request letter writing and grant writing. Additionally, the Fundraising Committee also prepares timelines and financial feasibility plans for each envisioned project.

4. Design Committee – Composed of (1) a lead researcher, (2) artistic coordinator, and (3) selected local artists. The lead researcher investigates the cost and selection of art supplies, construction materials, space usage, etc. The lead researcher identifies a key local artist who can conceptualize and draft designs for each project and/or serve as the artistic coordinator. The artistic coordinator brings together a handful of local artists to draw out the finer details of the visual piece and guide the fabrication of the project to its final construction.

5. Education Committee – Conducts archival and textual research, develops curriculum and culturally-relevant pedagogy for the Filipino American community and beyond and builds working partnerships with student and collegiate organizations (high school and university).

D. Project Team

Our project team is made up of advisory board members and key volunteers with defined roles and responsibilities.

Dr. Estella Habal, Advisory Board – Dr. Habal is an Assistant Professor of Interdisciplinary Social Science at San Jose State University. She teaches courses such as: Asian American Studies, Filipino Experience, Multicultural Perspectives in the U.S. and Asian American Women. She is a former board member of the Manilatown Heritage Foundation, and the writer of *San Francisco's International Hotel: Mobilizing the Filipino American Community in the Anti-Eviction Movement* (2008).

Dr. Jovina Navarro, Advisory Board - Dr. Navarro is an academic counselor at San Jose State University. She also serves as the advisor of SJSU's Filipino collegiate organization, Akbayan.

Steve Arevalo, Advisory Board and Public Relations Committee - Steve Arevalo's family was one of the first Filipino immigrant families to settle in Santa Clara County as

far back as the early 1920s. In 1992, Steve helped found the San Jose non-profit organization, Filipino Youth Coalition (FYC), which provides positive youth activities, choices and alternatives through education, culture, leadership, and community development.

Fred Hirsch, Advisory Board - Fred Hirsch is a retired plumber, an Executive Board Member of Plumbers and Fitters Local 393, a Delegate to the South Bay AFL-CIO Labor Council (SBLC) and the Santa Clara and San Benito Counties' Building and Construction Trades Councils. Arriving in San Jose in 1959, he made contact with Ernesto Galarza and became active in the movement to end the "Bracero Program." During 1967 and 1968 Fred and his family worked in Delano, CA with the United Farm Workers, led by Cesar Chavez and Larry Itliong. He still carries his UFW regular member card and currently represents the SBLC in groups working to reform immigration to a system that reflects the values of justice, family unification, and equal rights for all in the workplace and the community.

Jennifer E. Ereno, Advisory Board and Design Committee – Jennifer Ereno has been an attorney in private practice since 1985 with an emphasis on family and employment law. She has worked with West Bay Pilipino Multi-Services in San Francisco during the early 1980s and since then has been involved in various community organizations to develop and provide services for Filipino-American youth and Asian communities.

Julie Paguel Brett, Advisory Board and Design Committee - Julie Paguel Brett has been an Entrepreneur and Small Business Owner of 25 years: a Licensed Building Contractor, and retired Federal Contractor (8a) Certified, minority woman-owned small business (U.S. and Iraq), and Consultant for small business start-ups. In the early 1970s, Julie was actively involved in Filipino-related community projects throughout the SF Bay Area, which included: helping to start up the Filipino Youth Association, Peninsula for community and cultural involvement; serving as an education advocate for recent immigrants; and being instrumental in incorporating an Asian Division under the Multi-Cultural Center, as well as the first credited Asian Studies curriculum and staffing at Foothill College, Los Altos.

Vivian Bejarin, Design and Fundraising Committees - Vivian Bejarin is a Part-time English Composition Instructor at De Anza College. She teaches developmental English, and college-level English writing courses.

Angelica Cortez, Public Relations Committee - Angelica Cortez graduated from San Jose State University last May with a degree in Political Science. She currently works as a Public Policy Analyst for the Silicon Valley Council of Nonprofits and continues to remain engaged with the local Filipino community. Angelica also serves on the Board of Directors for the Pilipino American Heritage Corporation.

Sherwin Mendoza, Education Committee – Sherwin Mendoza is a PhD candidate at the University of California, Santa Cruz in the Department of Literature. He also teaches Asian American Literature as a part-time Instructor in the Department of Intercultural Studies at De Anza College.

Melissa Nievera-Lozano, Education Committee - Melissa Nievera-Lozano is a PhD student at the University of California, Santa Cruz in the Department of Education. Her research explores the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality as related to identity formation and structural inequities in American schools. She volunteers time with Filipino American youth at Overfelt High School in a service-learning program using critical ethnic studies curriculum.

Tarhata Rosal, Education Committee – Tarhata Rosal is a Registered Nurse in Pediatric Oncology, Hematology, & Stem Cell Transplant at Stanford Hospital. She shares her time as an On-Site Educator at Bay Area High Schools and Universities in Filipino history, Tagalog, and Woman's Rights.

Olivia Gail Sawi, Education Committee - Olivia Gail Sawi is a graduate student of History at San Jose State University. She is studying twentieth century United States history, focusing on Labor History and Filipino American History. Olivia also works as a Researcher and Assistant Public Historian for Archives and Architecture, a historic preservation firm in San Jose.

Noemi Teppang, Education Committee - Noemi Teppang graduated from San Jose State University majoring in Social Sciences and a minor in Asian American Studies. Currently, she works two economic jobs under the AANAPISI Grant at De Anza College and the Mental Health Department of Santa Clara County conducting outreach to Filipino families. Her passion lies in community work and organizing the youth in San Jose. She has recently joined efforts in founding an Anakbayan Silicon Valley chapter to address the issues of Filipino youth in San Jose and tying them to the struggles in the Philippines.

Danreb Reyes Victorio, Public Relations Committee - Danreb Reyes Victorio is an SJSU student majoring in Public Relations and minoring in Asian American Studies. He is currently the President of the Akbayan Pilipino-American Organization at SJSU. He was a student leader for the Mabuhay Cultural Club at Independence High School and an involved core member for the Filipino Youth Coalition, a non-profit dedicated to gang-prevention and cultural education for Filipino-American youth.

III. Community Need

Installing a mural, such as the one we are proposing, will create a stronger sense of inclusiveness, allow for more civic engagement among Filipino Americans, foster greater cooperation between communities, and spread public awareness citywide. The following two sections detail current day demographical statistics and historical research that further this proposed community need.

A. Population and Demographics

Milpitas holds one of the densest Filipino American populations in the United States. Local Filipino-owned businesses such as restaurants, bakeries, grocery stores, salons,

dental and medical offices, accounting services, real estate, notaries, retail stores, remittance and travel agencies and cargo shipping cater to a growing Filipino American population that comprise 15% or over 10,000 people out of a total of approximately 70,000 residents. The County of Santa Clara, in fact, holds the largest Filipino American population in Northern California at 85,000.

B. Filipino American History

Filipinos have been part of the American consciousness for more than 100 years, as early as the Spanish American War of 1898. After the Immigration Act of 1924, Filipinos were recruited to fill agricultural and service labor queues.

1. Migration to Santa Clara County

California's lush agricultural fields drew Filipino laborers in droves. They traveled through the state's major farming regions as "stoop labor" throughout the 20th century. From the 1920s to the 1960s, Filipinos picked lettuce in the Salinas Valley, grapes in the San Joaquin Valley, and asparagus in the Delta Region near Stockton. They followed crops throughout the seasons while finding work and living quarters in the Santa Clara Valley.

Santa Clara Valley has a particularly unique history of Filipino American livelihood and growth. As early as the 1920s, a vital site of employment for Filipinos resided in the area known as present-day Japantown in San Jose.¹ Working relationships and friendships were built among many Filipinos and Japanese farm owners. In fact, some Filipinos kindly helped maintain the operations of farms owned by Japanese families who were forced into internment camps during World War II.² Filipinos were a year-round labor force, picking strawberries, peaches, apricots, pears, prunes, and other crops throughout the orchards of San Jose.³ They oversaw the irrigation systems as long-term agricultural maintenance crews. To supplement their own diets along with their native foods, they even planted native Filipino vegetables in the city park. When there were no crops to be harvested, the Santa Clara Valley served as a wintering center for these migrant workers.⁴

Away from the fields, Filipinos attended San Jose State College and nearby Santa Clara University to study a range of subjects such as education and biology. Others worked as houseboys, or in country clubs and even hospitals.⁵ The city saw its first Filipino restaurant open in 1930, with nearby dance halls and pool halls serving as lively sites of recreation.⁶ Other forms of social activity and support were found in fraternal Filipino orders such as the Lapog Sons of San Jose, Caballeros de Dimas-Alang, and the M.H. Del Pilar Lodge No. 24 of San Jose.¹⁰ Thus, the city was more than just a corridor through which Filipino farmworkers migrated, chasing crops as the seasons changed. The Santa Clara Valley proved to be a place many Filipinos called home from the first half of the 20th century to the next.

2. Involvement in labor organizing

Filipino American labor union organizing has a long, tough-spirited history. The first Filipino Labor Union was established in Hawaii in 1919. With its first strike in 1920, the organizers set for another strike in 1924, spreading to twenty-three Hawaiian plantations and lasting for eight months.⁷ In 1930, Filipino farmworkers organized the Agricultural Workers League, pushing for unionization to combat the low bargaining position they held with growers.⁸ During the 1930s, subsequently, the Filipino Labor Union gained greater strength for California farmworkers, continuing the goals of the Union: a minimum wage of 35 cents per hour, an eight hour day, employment without discrimination on account of race, recognition of the Union as a bargaining agent, hiring through the Union shop, and abolition of labor contractors.⁹ Through the 1940s, Filipinos in the Imperial Valley lettuce fields staged a strike, the Filipino Agricultural Workers Association (FAWA) of San Joaquin and Sacramento Valley was formed, and the Filipino Agricultural Labors Association (FALA) became the most successful ethnic union. They were able to win asparagus and tomato strikes, secure wage increases, and improve working conditions.

3. Description of September 8th, 1965 Delano Grape Strike

This date commemorates the momentous event known as the Delano Grape Strike when 1500 farmworkers, comprised of Filipinos and other Asian groups, consciously chose to walk off the grape fields in Delano, California to fight for fair wages and benefits. At the time Filipino workers were paid thirty cents less than Mexican farmworkers. The Filipino-based union, known as the Agricultural Workers Organization Committee (AWOC), was led by Larry Itliong. Itliong was the progressive force that proposed an alliance with the National Farmworkers Association (NFWA), led by Mexican farmworker organizers, Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. The unification of these two labor organizations strengthened their struggle for equal compensation. The strike expanded into a national boycott, establishing a concrete foundation for union labor organizing.

Because of their aggressive efforts, Filipinos won the fight for increased wages, better working conditions, medical benefits, and the establishment of Pablo-Argbayani Village (a retirement community for Delano farmworkers and named due to the death of a Filipino grape striker).

4. Connection to Cesar Chavez and the Farmworker Movement

Cesar Chavez is a prominent figure in California's agricultural history. However, the missing piece of his legacy is that of the strong leadership and participation of Filipino American farmworkers in the struggle for their collective rights as laborers. In 1959, the AFL-CIO formed the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) made up predominantly of Filipino farmworkers; AWOC members chose labor organizer Larry Itliong as their leader. In the Summer of 1965, AWOC and Larry Itliong led hundreds of Filipino and Mexican grape pickers as they walked off the fields in the Coachella Valley, demanding fair wages. The movement spread, culminating on September 8, 1965, when Larry Itliong and AWOC initiated the Delano Grape Strike by walking off the fields. In

the name of labor rights and human dignity, they refused to work, demanded \$1.40 an hour and 25 cents per each box of grapes picked. It was then that AWOC asked Cesar Chavez and his fellow Mexican farmworkers of the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) to join their fight. With the encouragement of his fellow members in NFWA, Dolores Huerta and his wife Helen, Cesar Chavez agreed to merge with AWOC and strengthen their collective voice. Under the leadership of Larry Itliong and Cesar Chavez, both Filipino and Mexican farmworker groups formed the highly recognized United Farm Workers (UFW).¹⁰

5. Key Historical Figures

The following highlights key Filipino American Figures in this significant labor organizing movement.

a. Larry Dulay Itliong (February 8, 1917 to October 13, 1913) Was born in the Philippines and migrated to the United states in 1929. He became involved in union organizing both in California, Washington and Alaska, and he founded the Filipino Farm Labor Union in California. Later in 1967, he established AWOC, focusing on recruiting other farmworkers to be involved in the cause. The pivotal goals of AWOC were to end discrimination, gain union recognition, and push for higher wages and improved working conditions.

b. Philip Vera Cruz (December 25, 1904 - June 12, 1994) He migrated to the United States in 1926, worked various odd jobs, and settled in California as a farmworker. He joined AWOC in the 1950s; he became involved in the Delano Grape Strike, which lead to his leadership role as UFW vice president.

c. Pete Velasco (died December 1, 1995) He migrated from the Philippines to the US in 1931 and was one of the instrumental leaders who helped to organize the 1500 grape pickers in the Delano Grape Strike. He is well-known in the union labor community for his leadership as an outreach coordinator for AWOC and later as secretary-treasurer for the UFW, which he held for more than a decade after the 1965 strike.

d. Andy Imutan (died February 2, 2011) was one of the 1500 grape pickers who walked off grape fields of Coachella Valley. Actively involved in AWOC, he collaborated with fellow organizer Larry Itliong, and spurred talks of a united front with the leader of NFWA, Cesar Chavez, to picket against the Delano grape growers. Imutan organized with the UFW and held a position as Vice-President. He is the last of the legendary Delano Manongs to pass; his memorial service took place in Los Angeles on April 3, 2011. The day was designated “Delano Manongs Day,” according to the LA Times.

e. Ben Gines was an organizer in AWOC. Along with Larry Itliong, he was one of the original leaders of the strike on September 8, 1965. He ended up leaving after the UFW was formed.

f. **Pete Manuel** was also one of the original strikers on September 8, 1965.

IV. The Mural

As mentioned, the mural will commemorate the Grape Strike of September 8, 1965 and will highlight 4 heroes: Larry Itliong, Pete Velasco, Philip Vera Cruz, Andy Imutan, Pete Manuel, Ben Gines and the 1500 strikers.

The project will not be a financial burden on the City of Milpitas as the Filipino Memorial Project will finance the design, construction and installation of the plaque in hopes to have it presentable by Filipino American month in October, 2012. The total price is estimated at \$3500.

V. Conclusion

We, as a collective of scholars, historians, students, and community members look forward to receiving positive feedback about the possibilities of bringing this project to fruition. Given the current day population statistics of Filipino Americans in the City of Milpitas, the recorded histories of the Filipino farmworkers, connected to the Cesar Chavez's legacy of labor organizing and American history, and assembling of constituents towards this grassroots effort, it is an opportune time to install a self-funded \$3500 plaque commemorating Filipino farmworkers.

Endnotes

¹ Carey & Co. Inc., "San Jose Japantown Historic Context Statement and Reconnaissance Survey," Historic Context and Intensive Survey (San Jose, 2006).

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³ Lorraine Jacobs Crouchett, *Filipinos in California: From the Days of the Galleons to the Present* (El Cerrito, CA: Downe Place Publishing House, Inc., 1982), 34-40; Japanese American National Museum, "REGenerations Oral History Project: Rebuilding Japanese American Families, Communities, and Civil Rights in the Resettlement Era: San Jose Region: Volume 4," *calisphere*, 2007, <http://content.cdlib.org/view?query=filipino&docId=ft600006bb&chunk.id=0&toc.depth=1&toc.id=0&brand=calisphere&x=0&y=0> (accessed March 15, 2010); H. Brett Melendy, "Filipinos in the United States," *The Pacific Historical Review* (University of California Press) 43, no. 4 (November 1974): 520-547; San Jose Mercury News, "Valley Filipino Labor Dropped Under Threats," *San Jose Mercury News*, August 14, 1930: 1; Santa Clara Valley Filipino American Historical Society, "The Frances Trimillos Interview," *Lost Generation: Filipino Journal* 1, no. 1 (1991): 47-51; Jess Tabasa, interview by Olivia Gail Sawi, , *History of the Tabasa Family, Watsonville, and the Riots*, (March 31, 2010); Ronald Takaki, *Strangers From a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1998); Edward N. Torbert, "The Specialized Commercial Agriculture of Northern Santa Clara Valley," *Geographical Review* (American Geographical Society) 26, no. 2 (April 1936): 247-263; Dr. Roberto V. Vallangca, *Pinoy: The First Wave* (San Francisco, CA: Strawberry Hill Press, 1977).

⁴ Alex Fabros, interview by Steve Arevalo, Estella Habal, Olivia Sawi and Jovina Navarro, , *Filipino History* , (April 12, 2010).

⁵ Santa Clara Valley Filipino American Historical Society, "The Frances Trimillos Interview," *Lost Generation: Filipino Journal* 1, no. 1 (1991): 47-51; Dr. Roberto V. Vallangca, *Pinoy: The First Wave* (San Francisco, CA: Strawberry Hill Press, 1977).

⁶ San Jose Mercury News, "First Filipino Restaurant Opens In San Jose," *San Jose Mercury News*, December 31, 1930: 4; San Jose Mercury News, "Valley Filipino Labor Dropped Under Threats," *San Jose Mercury News*, August 14, 1930: 1; Dr. Roberto V. Vallangca, *Pinoy: The First Wave* (San Francisco, CA: Strawberry Hill Press, 1977).

⁷ Howard A. DeWitt, *Violence in the Fields: California Filipino Farm Labor Unionization During the Great Depression* (Saratoga: Century Twenty One Publishing, 1980), 79.

⁸ Lorraine Jacobs Crouchett, *Filipinos in California: From The Days of the Galleons to the Present* (El Cerrito, California: Downey Place Publishing House, Inc., 1982), 40.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁰ DOLE Migration Information Resource, "The OFW's Unsung Hero," *DOLE Migration Information Resource*, April 6, 2006, http://www.ilsdole.gov.ph/mirc/mig_hero.htm (accessed April 12, 2010).

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