

PLACES & FACES

Filipino Community Offers Sustenance in All Forms

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With a membership of 300, the Filipino American Community of the Yakima Valley stretches from Yakima to the Tri-Cities.

Rey Pascua, current president, and Mike Antonio, vice president, say the history stretches even farther.

"In this Valley, back in the 1930s and '40s, the Filipinos in the community were victims of racism and unjust treatment," Pascua said. "We had good friends in Sunnyside who helped the Filipino community; Sunnyside was a haven for Filipinos back then."

"We were also helped along by the Yakama Nation," he added. "They allowed us to lease their farmland, and we farmed it. That was the backbone of economic survival in the community. We called it truck gardening. Whatever we grew, we put it on trucks to sell it. We also became famous for our vegetable stands along Lat-eral A."

Pascua said Wapato is known as the capital of the Yakima Valley Filipino Community.

"The community is a team effort and Mike has been a great leader in the past as president, working right along with the rest of the officers and board members," Pascua said.

The community in the past has sponsored many events for surrounding cities, and in keeping with the traditions of the past it started a weekly event known as Filipino Take Out.

It's a special night every Thursday, held since late February, during which the community offers traditional Filipino cuisine. Families can dine in or take out dishes such as pancit, lumpia, stir-fry and chicken adobo. Dinners cost \$5 each.

"Depending on the response of the customers, we may expand take-out to include

more days during the week by this summer," Antonio said.

Proceeds from the dinners will be used to finance the community's scholarship fund, which is geared toward graduating high school seniors planning to attend college.

"The scholarships are all \$250 and we hope to increase that amount in the future," Pascua said.

The community's first-ever customer for Filipino Take Out was Wapato's Julie Finch, who comes in every week for the dinner.

"I come to the yearly dinner, but this is better because I get to have this great food every week," Finch said. "I like all of the food, but I must admit that the pancit is the best. It is my favorite. This is going to make me broke, but it is well worth it. I wish they would have done this a lot sooner."

The community used to sponsor bingo on Thursday nights, but after the Yakama casino opened the bingo players dwindled. Funds raised from bingo covered some of its events.

The community incorporated in 1937 and has been at its current location, 211 W. Second St. in Wapato, since 1952. It celebrated its 48th anniversary Saturday with a dinner at the hall.

There was a farmer's cooperative that started in the late '40s. To survive, they pooled resources together. The community's success stories come from word of mouth, a little bit of advertising and their visits to places where they have friends, such as seniors' homes.

Pascua is a diversity program manager with the Child Protective Service agency and he works along with the Department of Social and Health Services of Yakima.

Antonio is a U.S. Postal Service employee who's been in the Yakima Valley for years.

"I grew up here in the Valley

and was born at Memorial Hospital," Antonio said. "I grew up here way back in the '40s. I have been the president of the community for about five years. We have an election every year for new officers, for anyone who wants to take on the work."

And work they do. The community is involved with many projects in the Valley — annual events like Wapato's new farmers market and a local basketball league.

"We have a basketball team here with the Wapato Men's City League. Here you will find Filipinos of different nationalities that play on our team, such as Shag Williams, who is the head basketball coach at Davis High School in Yakima, Leland Jiles, Phil Harris and Charles Thomas, who all play with us as

well as myself," Pascua said. "We made them join the community to play with us. We are rated No. 1 in the league."

The community is open to anyone who wants to join it. "We have Native Americans, Hispanics, blacks and white members who join with us," Antonio said.

Said Pascua: "We have two big major functions that we now do during the year. We celebrate our anniversary for the community, and our Harvest Dinner, which celebrates a good agricultural year that our farmers have had ... which is usually held in November."

Last year, the community also started a newsletter called "Valley Traditions," which is divided into three languages: English, Tagalog Filipino and Ilo-

cono Filipino.

"The community wants to establish more youth programs and build a meal program for Valley residents as well as a meal program for elderly shut-ins in private and nursing homes," Pascua said.

Antonio said a lot of people involved with the community are not members.

"There are well over 1,000 Filipinos in the entire Valley who are not members, but some do contribute their time and effort to help out in some of the activities that go on," Antonio said.

Eduerda Gurtiza, one of the original members of the community when it moved to its current location, recalls the grand opening of the hall in 1952.

"I have been here since the beginning and it is good," Gur-

tiza said. "There is even one here that is 95 years old. This is good."

Antonio said only 10 of the original members are still alive and involved with the community.

Upcoming events that the Filipino American Community of the Yakima Valley Inc. is involved with include:

- Wapato Middle School Food Fair, sponsored by the Asian Youth Organization, March 30.

- The community's Easter potluck at Ahtanum Youth Park in Yakima, April 23.

- The annual potluck on June 3, when the graduating Class of 2000 will be honored.

■ For more information on upcoming events or on ordering a dinner, call 877-3087.



JESSIE SANTOS/For Voices

Julie Finch shows off pancit, lumpia and rice she bought at Filipino Take Out, offered every Thursday by the Wapato-based Filipino American Community of the Yakima Valley as a fund raiser. At left is organization president Rey Pascua; vice president Mike Antonio is at right. Finch was the first customer of the Take Out program and comes back every week.