



Merry Christmas

Editor shares insight into his view into the true meaning of the holiday season.

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Giving Is the Gift During Christmas

Advent, Christmas; a time for epiphany.

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The Year Recapped

Asst. Editor Alfredo Evangelista looks at the intersection of news with life.

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Fil·Am Voice

Magkaisa Tayong Lahat | "Let Us All Unite"

December 2025 • Vol IX No 12 | FILIPINO AMERICAN VOICE • UPLIFTING OUR COMMUNITY | FREE

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Serving during mass increases Catholic faith. p6



Event honoring the late Agrifina Cabebe, an event that helps scholarships. p8



Do not fear, learn and use artificial intelligence as a tool. 13



The Nativity - painting by Lorenzo Monaco (Piero di Giovanni).

IMAGE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS. RETRIEVED FROM https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:The_Nativity_MET_DT709.jpg&oldid=1115387812.

Goodbye 2025, Good Morning 2026!

Alfredo G. Evangelista | ASSISTANT EDITOR | PHOTOS COURTESY ALFREDO G EVANGELISTA



Bessy playing in the snow.

As we bid goodbye to 2025, we anticipate the new year with hope for peace, health and prosperity.

For many of us, 2025 was filled with both highlights and challenges. Sadly, we woke up to news of deaths on O'ahu due to fireworks. And from January 7 through January 31, fires ravaged Southern California—the two largest fires were in the Pacific Palisades area and the Altadena vicinity.

In 2025, everyone's lives intertwined with the news of the day. Mine surely did.

In early January 2025, my wife Bessy and I traveled to the Washington DC area to

visit the newest grandchild in the Evangelista 'ohana. My son Christian and my daughter-in-law Carolyn named their second daughter after my Mom—Catalina, who passed in July 2024. The young Catalina was born in November 2024 and we couldn't travel to the East Coast until early January (and we celebrated Bessy's birthday that week). It was cold and it even snowed in the DC area. On the day of our arrival, I almost slipped on the icy sidewalk.

The inauguration of Donald Trump (which would be moved indoors due to the weather) was a week away;

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FREE



The inauguration of President Donald Trump.

2025 Recap ...

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we didn't run into any unusual situations except at the Portland airport where airport security checked each person's ID at the gate before boarding the flight to DC (Dulles airport not the Reagan airport where a tragic airplane crash would occur in late January). (For a full text of President Trump's inauguration address, see the January 2025 issue of the *Fil-Am Voice*.)

During our trip, we found time to worship at the Washington National Cathedral. On the day after President Trump's Inauguration, the National Cathedral hosted A Service of Prayer for the Nation. President Trump, Vice President Vance, their families and

other dignitaries attended. In her sermon, The Right Reverend Mariann Edgar Budde, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington exhorted President Trump to have mercy. ("In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now.") President Trump would later demand an apology from Bishop Budde, claiming the service was "nasty."

During this January trip, we flew for the very first time on Alaska Airlines, which was undergoing a merger with Hawaiian Airlines. Initially, it was a way different experience which concerned me. To start, when we checked in at Kahului, for some reason our TSA pre-check status did not transfer over. We didn't want to go back to the check-in counter so we braved the non-TSA pre-check line and had to remove our shoes, etc. It's



A selfie outside of the Washington National Cathedral.

a good thing my socks didn't have any holes. I had tried to synchronize my Hawaiian Miles program with the Alaska program but it wasn't working and even when I called, they said it would take some time because it had to be manually inputted. So at that time, we didn't get priority boarding

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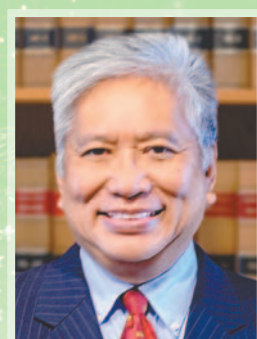
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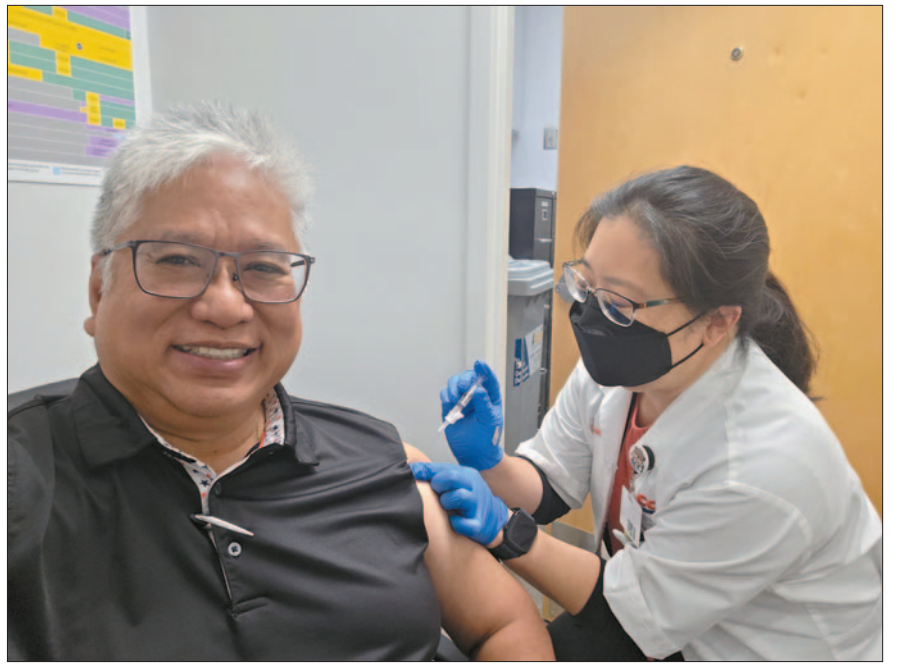
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On retirement day, Bessy poses with her grandson Lucas.

and had to pay for our excess baggage. Also, the airplanes Alaska uses to fly to the West Coast seats three persons together (instead of the two, four, two configuration of Hawaiian Airlines). Bessy normally gets the window and I would get the aisle next to her but because there were three



Getting a flu shot at Costco.

seats, I was stuck in the middle and yes, a rather large, obtuse, young male sat right next to me, squeezing me in. At some point, I needed to use the bathroom but the guy next to me was crunched forward, sleeping and wouldn't budge; I kept saying, excuse me, I have to use the bathroom but it was difficult. He finally woke up and instead of him standing up, I practically had to climb over him. *Auwe!* Now, we take the aisle seat and middle seat so we don't have to climb over anyone to use the bathroom aka CR or comfort room. While we were waiting at the Portland gate, I tried synchronizing our mileage accounts and *voilà!* it worked and we boarded early.

Later in the year, the merger/acquisition became official. While some of

my friends have expressed disappointment and confusion, I've found out some positive stuff. For example, when you travel on earned miles, you now get status points on Atmos—the new mileage program for Hawaiian+Alaska. Hawaiian never gave you that. Also, if you're upgraded on Alaska, your traveling companion also gets upgraded; not so if you're traveling on Hawaiian. And if I get free bags on Alaska, my traveling companions (up to a certain number) get free bags also! Wow, can you imagine if Alaska flew to the Philippines—I could bring a whole bunch of *balikbayan* boxes. But wait, even though Alaska does not travel to the Philippines, you can book your flight through Alaska Airlines and

see 2025 RECAP next page






MAHALO to our incredible healthcare 'ohana

CONGRATULATIONS 2025 EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

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Mahalo to our neighbors and partners for joining us on this journey. Wishing you and yours a joyous Holiday Season and bright New Year!

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From the Editor's Desk

Vince Bagoyo, Jr.
EDITOR • FIL-AM VOICE



This image released by Linnaea Mallette shows the Holy family in a humble stable, Mary and Joseph looking at the newborn Jesus lying in a manger on Christmas night.

IMAGE COURTESY PUBLICDOMAINPICTURES.NET

Merry Christmas!

Birth of a Savior.

It's Christmas—my favorite season of the year! Many will be busy shopping for gifts for someone special in your life. Christmas has evolved into a widely celebrated cultural holiday of gift-giving, family and festive traditions.

While its roots are in honoring Jesus' nativity, modern celebrations blend religious meaning with secular customs like Santa Claus, trees and feasts, recognizing it is a time for joy, reflection and community.

The reason for this season of Christmas is to celebrate and commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ, marking Him as our Messiah and Son of God who brought salvation and hope to those who believe, the promised Savior.

It is a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophesies, bringing "good news" and salvation from sin. He is Emmanuel—"God is with Us."

What I love the most about Christmas is recognizing and acknowledging the divine goodness of our Savior and how much He loves us unconditionally.

May we all celebrate this holiday season by sharing our time and extending love and kindness to our fellow men—this is the greatest gift we can share to commemorate the birth of our Savior.

This Christmas season, as we all rejoice in the birth of Jesus Christ, may you all experience renewed hope, joy and peace.

From *The Fil-Am Voice* 'ohana—wishing you all a blessed Christmas and a prosperous and joyous New Year! ✨

VINCE BAGOYO, JR. | EDITOR



Reading to my granddaughters.



Homecoming festivities at the University of Southern California.

2025 Recap ...

from p. 3

earn Atmos points—but still fly on Philippine Airlines, which is a partner with Alaska. For the infrequent traveler to the Philippines, it makes sense as it takes a lot of flights to the Philippines to get the full benefit of *Mabuhay* miles. I'm still not happy how sometimes it takes a long time to get connected to Alaska through the phone (it takes longer if you have a question on your Atmos account) but my contact at Alaska tells me they're working on it. And yes, the food on Alaska Airlines does not compare with the food on Hawaiian Airlines. But I am generally pleased with the merger and really happy I did not lose my Hawaiian miles during the merger—which happened to me when Aloha Airlines filed bankruptcy. (For more questions and answers on the merger, see the September 2025 issue of the *Fil-Am Voice*.)

brought back some oak leaves to share with her grandson Lucas. It was cold again! But it was important to me to spend some time with my granddaughters who I hardly see. (Bessy gets to see her two grandsons almost every day.) During this time of travel, the government was shut down. We



Our view at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum during the Iowa vs. USC football game.

In November, Bessy and I returned to the DC area to celebrate my granddaughters' birthdays (both were born in November—a week apart). We first celebrated Cora's third birthday and then celebrated Catalina's first birthday. Bessy was in awe with the changing season; she

were afraid flights would be delayed or canceled; I figured if our flight was canceled, we would be stranded because our priority for re-booking would be at the bottom due to our fly-

see 2025 RECAP p.7



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DINENGDENG & PINAKBET

The Gift of Giving During the Time of Advent and Christmas



Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran — PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

2025

flew by and it's already Advent and the Christmas season.

Filipinos simply get into all-things Christmas. As kids in Pā'ia during the tail-end of the Plantation days, we had Cook Pine Christmas trees decorated with bright balls and tinsel. I think my sister and I would get one new toy and we were happy about it.

My grandfather Lino fashioned a traditional *parol* with some bamboo he harvested and dried from a hedge in Ha'ikū and some "Japanese" paper purchased from Pā'ia Mercantile. He

slit bamboo strips and then tied the flexible pieces with twine into two five-pointed stars which he then connected into a frame. He then carefully cut fitted coverings from the crepe-like paper which he then glued over the arms of the frame. After the glue dried, he finished by painting some designs on the edge of the star's five arms and hanging ribbons from each of the points to complete the lantern.

I don't think too many people make home-made *parol* anymore.

Some years ago when we used to hold a Maui Fil-Am Heritage Festival, it turns out there are now commercial *parol* kits. You just decorated the coverings and voilà, without all the fuss, you had a *parol*. One of the



Christmas in Kahului in the 1980s.

Filipino stores in Central Maui even sells "Filipino stars" with lighting already included.

Over the years, I've tried convincing my spouse (a cradle Episcopalian from Texas) that Filipinos begin playing Christmas carols in early Fall because the Christmas season in the

motherland covers the -Ber months (September, October, November and December). That's my story and I'm stickin' to it (but she still doesn't buy it). In her view, people should follow the holidays in proper seasonal sequence—lights should go up only af-

see DINENGDENG & PINAKBET p.7



Sometimes Lydia Coloma is on Santa's naughty list.



And sometimes Lydia Coloma is on Santa's good list.



We celebrated Christmas in Johnson City, Texas with Kallie Keith-Agaran's sister and some of her nieces and a nephew in 2012.



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Noah Baloaloo

The saying "Church is more than a building" emphasizes faith is more than being in a physical place but a relationship between people devoted to Christian beliefs. It is expressed through worship, service and practices. Tedious work goes into preparing the Mass from liturgical practices, such as communion, to the booklets distributed by hospitality members. Yet, no one truly feels as if this is work but a sense of duty evoking an enriching feeling. This is one of many reasons why parishioners, including myself, love being Christian. A group of young acolytes who also serve as leaders in their parish communities, St. Anthony and Christ the King, come together for this column to express what it means for them to be altar servers and how they prepare for the Advent season.

Being an acolyte seems so intimi-

Google® Is Not Everything ... Serving the Peace

Ehra Louise Guiwa | MAUI HIGH SCHOOL, CLASS OF 2028

dating because everyone watches your every move and not to mention, you are ever so close to the priest. For **Jacel Jarra**, her journey started with the curiosity of what it might feel like to be up on the altar. "I wanted to see what it was like to be up at the altar instead of just sitting in the pews; I

thought it would be a much better experience to actually be involved in the Mass rather than just watching from the crowd." Since her calling to serve the Lord, for the last seven years, Jacel has served as a proud acolyte. Not only does this help Jacel become closer to her faith but "It's also made me feel like a real part of the parish" as she gets to meet teens in their journey of faith. Jacel prepares for Advent by the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is not always easy; sometimes we hide behind the fear and shame of our sins but like Jacel, by finding the courage to confess them, we find solace in God.

Another acolyte from Christ the King, **Leia Hook**, says "It is an honor to be an altar server for my church and I will never regret becoming one." After seeing her older sister become an acolyte, Leia has since felt inspired, thus having her mom sign her up as one when she reached the appropriate age. Leia describes being an acolyte as a way for her to grow closer to God. Through attending daily mass and reciting prayers, this is a way Leia prepares for the Advent season.

For **Herman "Trey" Andaya**, his perspective shows "the altar servers were the cool kids of the church." But being cool is not what led Trey to being an acolyte. "Knowing where we come from and staying connected with those traditions strengthens our love and deeper understanding of Christ" is what truly led him on this path. Trey has become deeply involved in the St. Anthony Parish community, joining numerous ministries and forming new friendships. Trey's devotion to his faith is apparent in the seven years he served as an acolyte. *Simbang Gabi*, which translates into "Church Night," is a nine-night novena to worship the coming of Jesus Christ. This is more than just worship but serves a tradi-

tional significance with the Filipino community. Trey has committed to attending all nine masses as a way to prepare for Advent.

Lastly, **Noah Baloaloo**, like the rest, became an altar server to better connect with his community. He comments, "the impact that this ministry had on me, the church and the parish community is something that changed beautifully." Noah has been serving for the past five years at St. Anthony Church; however, it was not always easy. In the beginning, anxiety filled Noah at every Mass he served but "Father Ace and my good friend Rob taught me how the Mass worked and what to do at what times. Over time, the Lord guided me to get the hang of it." Now, he is a leading figure at St. Anthony Church who has even taught upcoming altar servers what to do. From being anxiety-ridden to confidently serving as an acolyte, Noah's growth is a symbol of how good the Lord is. During the Advent season, to spread Christ's light to those around him is how Noah chooses to prepare.

Our young group of acolytes has done so much in support of their Church, with their faith in God standing as a heavy foundation. The rise of youth growing in their connection to God is growing day by day. Suddenly, the topic of "Who becomes the future of the Church?" is not worrisome because of outstanding young leaders like Jacel, Noah, Trey and Leia who inspire the next generation. ✨

Google® Is Not Everything ... is a monthly column authored by high school students. The column's title emphasizes that education is more than just googling a topic. Google® is a registered trademark. This month's guest columnist is **Ehra Louise Guiwa**, a Sophomore at Maui High School. She is the President of Sabers Of Law (Maui High's Mock Trial Club), one of the Executive Vice Presidents for Student Government, Historian in the Key Club, and a student of eskrima under Doce Pares Multi-Style Hawai'i. Ehra Louise is in the Law and Public



Safety pathway at Maui High and aspires to be a U.S senator. In her free time, she enjoys sewing, baking, volunteering at church, spending time with family and friends, and exploring. She is the only daughter of Merlyn Guiwa and Reymund Guiwa.

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Lydia Coloma and Kallie Keith-Agaran at the White House, during the 2013 Christmas season.

ter the Kahului Hongwanji Bazaar and All Hallows' Eve. My mother still leaves some Christmas lights up on her house for the entire year.

I like the season but I've never been able to get into the rhythm of the best celebrators. I'm a bad Christmas card (or annual family update) sender so I kinda gave up trying. I've also been known to wait until the last minute to get gifts for folks on my list—people will just have to settle for bottles of selected adult beverages and t-shirts with quirky sayings printed on them from me.

As I've noted in the past, the major festive tradition followed by Maui residents—Christian or not—is our great generosity during the holidays. As we mark the third Christmas following the Lahaina and Upcountry tragedies, it's good to hear about all the rebuilding that's been completed. The State announced it started to allow some boating activities in Lahaina Harbor (which still needs to be rebuilt). And the lawsuits apparently are moving towards a settlement of sorts—probably far less than what people lost. Obviously, money and materials alone can't restore what fires took away from so many in our community. But it's heartening how Maui residents and local businesses continue to open their hearts for those with needs in our community.

And as Linus from "A Charlie Brown Christmas" reminds us, the meaning of Christmas is the hope that comes from such gifts of love:

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

And all went to



be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. (Luke 2: 1-14 KJV) **

Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran hopped around in various positions in the Cayetano Administration before returning home to practice law. He served for a period of time in the Hawai'i legislature representing Central Maui communities in the State House of Representatives and the State Senate.

2025 Recap ...

from p. 4

ing on miles. But the only delay was about half an hour in Portland. The TSA personnel were tired and you could sense their frustration and anxiety about not getting paid but still having obligations for food, shelter and transportation. My daughter in law was deemed an essential worker so she had to work for free although when the government was re-opened, she got her back pay.

The trip was also a vacation gift for Bessy. After forty years of working for the same company—Maui Chemical and Paper Products/TJ's Warehouse—she retired on October 31. With retirement, you have to deal with issues of social security, Medicare and supplemental health insurance. Yes, in case you haven't figured it out, Medicare does NOT cover everything! And social security is never enough. The cost of health care and prescription drugs is astronomical. (I take a number of pills each day for a variety of medical conditions—high blood pressure, heart etc. and I am always visiting my eye doctor (my high school classmate Dr. David Anzai at Aloha Eye Clinic), my dentist (fellow Maui High School and USC alum Jonathan Lum), my primary care physician (Dr. Nolan Arruda, another fellow Maui High School and USC alum), as well as specialists for der-

matology (USC alum Dr. Micki Ly) and urology (I think Dr. Carlsen's uncle is a USC alum), so having a good medical plan and insurance is important to me. (During the government shutdown, the Democrats said they were fighting for Obamacare.)

The second half of the November trip was to attend my 45th class reunion for the University of Southern California. This year's Homecoming week featured the reunion classes for 1980 (my year), 1975 (the 50th year) and a whole bunch of younger classes



The Los Angeles Dodgers repeat as World Champions!

(they celebrate on a five-year basis). Our class' 40th year reunion was during the pandemic. Initially, Pac-12 canceled football but after a few weeks, reinstated the games without allowing anyone to attend the games. The reunions were held online (give your classmate a hug via Zoom! Yeah, right.) And I refused to attend the zoom reunions. But this time I went; I hardly saw anyone I remembered from my class but met with some of the other reunion committee members. And yes, we attended the USC-

see 2025 RECAP p.12

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Community... In Action



Binhi at Ani Filipino Community Center is open for your celebrations.

PHOTO: CEASAR LIZADA PHOTOGRAPHY



Fr. John Tomoso began the evening with an 'Oli.

PHOTO: CEASAR LIZADA PHOTOGRAPHY



On behalf of the Cabebe family, Raymond Cabebe, the son of the late Aggie Cabebe, welcomed the guests.

PHOTO: CEASAR LIZADA PHOTOGRAPHY



The Philippine Nurses Association Maui Hawaii volunteered for the Bayanihan Feeding Program.

PHOTOS: CHRISTINE GUMPAL



The Maria Lanakila Church Filipino Folk Dancers, who were students of Aggie Cabebe, provided cultural entertainment.

PHOTO: CEASAR LIZADA PHOTOGRAPHY



Former students of Aggie Cabebe from the Outrigger Kaanapali Beach Resort performed.

PHOTOS: CEASAR LIZADA PHOTOGRAPHY

BINHI AT ANI

Celebrate your special events at Binhi at Ani Filipino Community Center. The Center can be rented on Mondays through Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. for \$1,400 (which includes the cleaning fee) plus GET and a \$500 security deposit or from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. for \$1,200 (which includes the cleaning fee) plus GET and a \$500 security deposit.

On Sundays, the Center can be rented from 1:30 p.m. to 11 p.m. for \$1,050 (which includes the cleaning fee) plus GET and a \$500 security deposit.

If alcohol is provided and/or served, there is an additional fee of \$300 and you must hire two licensed bartenders.

If alcohol is BYOB or placed in coolers,



COMMUNITY... IN ACTION

Compiled by Assistant Editor Alfredo G. Evangelista.

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there is an additional fee of \$500.

The office is open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and on Saturdays by appointment only. Telephone (808) 877-7880.

A Bayanihan Christmas: Aggie Cabebe Scholarship Fundraiser was held on December 21. The event is held to honor the legacy of the late Agrifi-



na "Aggie" Cabebe, a trailblazer in Maui's Filipino community who was known for her pioneer efforts in promoting the Bayanihan Spirit and preserving the Filipino culture. Cabebe was the first president of Binhi at Ani and known as the "Mother of Filipino Folk Dance" on Maui. The net proceeds from the event



fund the Agrifina Cabebe/Binhi at Ani Scholarship. To date, eight scholars have received a total of \$16,000. Hedy Udarbe was presented the "Promoting the Bayanihan Spirit Award" by Binhi at Ani. Udarbe volunteers not only for Binhi at Ani but also for her church, senior citizens and other organizations. Udarbe's continuous volunteer leadership helps to sustain and improve Maui's Filipino community.

Bayanihan Feeding Program provides a Sunday lunch to Hale Mahaolu Residents in Central Maui (Hale Mahaolu Elua and Hale Mahaolu Akahi) and Maui Adult Day Care. Through November 30, 2025, a total of 40,407 lunches have been distributed.

Teams serving during the month of November 2025 include Central Pacific Bank,



Mayor Richard T. Bissen, Jr. extended his greetings.

PHOTO: CEASAR LIZADA PHOTOGRAPHY



Richelle Antonio entertained the audience with her performance of few Tagalog songs.

PHOTO: CEASAR LIZADA PHOTOGRAPHY



2025 Miss Barrio Fiesta Kyrah Navarro Pagdilao and Second Princess Sofiya Marey Dominique Quines Cartagena performed Alitaptap.

PHOTO: CEASAR LIZADA PHOTOGRAPHY



The J-1 Teachers sang a medley.

PHOTO: CEASAR LIZADA PHOTOGRAPHY



Aunty Lola Balubar and her keiki performed.

PHOTO: CEASAR LIZADA PHOTOGRAPHY



Hedy Udarbe, recipient of the Promoting the Bayanihan Spirit award, was honored by Mark Paranada (representing the Cabebe family), Binhi at Ani president Arnel Alvarez, State Senator Troy Hashimoto, Mayor Richard Bissen, Jr., Council Vice Chair Yuki Lei Sugimura, Councilmember-designate Kauanoe Batangan, and Leon Bolosan (representing Governor Josh Green).

PHOTO: CEASAR LIZADA PHOTOGRAPHY



Hedy Udarbe's close friends surprised her with flowers and a birthday cake while the attendees sang Happy Birthday.

PHOTO: CEASAR LIZADA PHOTOGRAPHY



Enhance@Fitness for Kūpuna at Binhi At Ani Filipino Community Center classes are held.

PHOTO: CLAUDETTE MEDEIROS

Confederation International Association of Samahang Ilocano Group, Maui County Federal Credit Union, Philippine Nurses Association Maui Hawai'i and Seventh Day Adventist (Kihei and Lahaina).

There is a need for additional teams of volunteers to prepare the free lunches. Create a Team by contacting Melen Agcolicol at (808) 205-7981. Tax-deductible donations are accepted via Paypal or a Credit/Debit card or by mailing a check payable to Binhi at Ani, 780 Onehe'e Avenue, Kahului, HI 96732 [Memo: Feeding Program].

The Bayanihan Feeding Program is a partnership with Maui Food Bank and is supported by grants from Bayer Crop Science Hawai'i and Nareit Hawai'i.

Enhance@Fitness for Kūpuna at Binhi at Ani Filipino Community Center classes are continuing. Offered in partnership with the County of Maui, Office on Aging, classes are held on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 6:15 a.m. to 7:15 a.m.; from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m.; from



8:45 a.m. to 9:45 a.m. Enhance@Fitness is an exercise program for those over 50 years of age that improves cardiovascular fitness, strength, flexibility and balance. Since July 2022 and through May 2025, there have been 944 classes with seventy-five participants. For more information on Enhance@Fitness, contact Enhance@Fitness Coordinator Ginny Kiick (808) 280-6251 or gkiick@hotmail.com or Wellness Coordinator Claudette Medeiros (808) 463-3166 or claudette.b.medeiros@co.maui.hi.us.

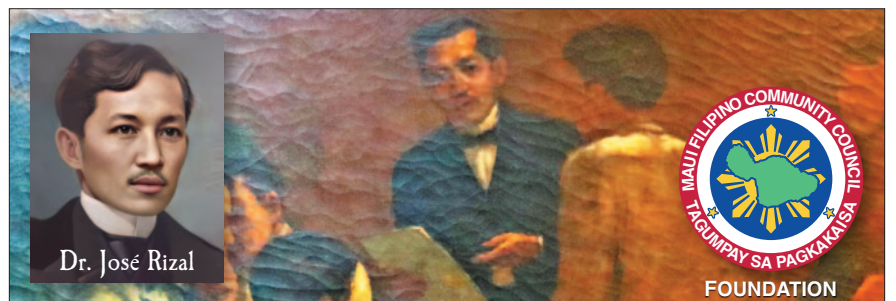
MAUI FILIPINO COMMUNITY COUNCIL AND MAUI FILIPINO COMMUNITY COUNCIL FOUNDATION

The Maui Filipino Community Council and the Maui Filipino Community Council Foundation will present the **Dr. José P. Rizal Leadership Awards** on January 10,



Marcia Paranada, the daughter of the late Aggie Cabebe, expressed her thanks and then led the audience in the Electric Slide.

PHOTOS: CEASAR LIZADA PHOTOGRAPHY



The 2025-2026 Dr. José P. Rizal Scholarship Dinner will be held Saturday, Jan. 10, 2026. For tickets, call (808) 298-2395

IMAGE COURTESY MAUI FILIPINO COMMUNITY COUNCIL FOUNDATION

2026 at the Maui Beach Hotel Ballroom, beginning at 5:30 p.m. The event will honor individuals who exemplify the courage, intellect and compassion of the Philippines' national hero, Dr. José P. Rizal. Beyond celebrating leadership, the evening serves as a fundraiser for the MFCC Foundation, a Hawai'i nonprofit corporation with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status, dedicated to providing scholarships for deserving high school graduates pursuing higher education.

The honorees represent a diverse cross-section of excellence in Maui's Filipino community. Distinguished Service: Tante Urban; Outstanding Citizen: Nestor Ugale, Jr.; Outstanding Youth: Angel Alba; Outstanding Member: Perlita Manlansing; Excellence in the Arts: Lance Collins, Ph.D.; Excellence in Education: Sydney Villegas, Ph.D.; Excellence in Medicine: Dr. Gloria Rongcal Gage; Excellence in Lit-

erature & Media: Vince G. Bagoyo, Jr. and Excellence in Science: Alvin "Kai" Pelayo.

"By honoring these nine remarkable leaders, we not only celebrate the legacy of Dr. José Rizal but also invest in the next generation of visionaries through our scholarship program," said Made-lyne Pascua, MFCC President.

In addition to the awards ceremony, the evening will feature a Filipiniana Attire Gala and the formal installation of the 2026 MFCC Board of Directors.

The MFCC Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving Filipino heritage, fostering community leadership, and supporting educational advancement for students on Maui. Through cultural events and advocacy, the Maui Filipino Community Council strives to empower the Filipino community and contribute to the vibrant diversity of Maui County. For further information, contact CJ Ancheta at corncheta@gmail.com.



Snow on Mount Haleakalā on Maui during the holidays.

Nativity of the Lord, Christmas 2025

We must honor our past, live in the present and be prepared and ready for the future!

Deacon Patrick Constantino | PHOTOS COURTESY PATRICK CONSTANTINO

God always has a new plan for every year, even if we are not ready!

His message is to continue to grow in love in Him, and He in me! To live and honor His beginnings and past, and grow in the Spirit of the present and become who He wants us to be! Let us reset our life and faith according to his will!

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (2:15-20):

When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

The Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

Good morning everyone! Merry Christmas! What a joy it is to gather with all of you and celebrate such an incredible mystery. And we need mysteries. It seems with each passing generation fewer and fewer things remain a mystery, as more and more things about our world get fig-

ured out or discovered or explained.

Think for a moment about your grandparents and what the world was like when they were the age you are now. And think specifically about all the things we know today that they didn't know, all the incredible advancements in science and technology that would seem like magic to them if they were here, all the stuff that was a mystery to them that we now have explanations for. Yes, with each passing generation many mysteries from the past vanish. It seems like only a few remain.

Which category does Christmas fall into? I wonder sometimes if much of what we believe in faith loses a certain special-ness with each

passing year. Things that amazed us when we were younger start feeling common, ordinary, routine. A perfect example of that is the Creed.

Most of us have said it so many times we no longer even think about the words. It's sort of like a kind of spiritual alphabet we memorize but rarely contemplate. And yet, almost every sentence of it is remarkable, almost every sentence of it a profound declaration, almost every sentence of it a mystery that can never be explained away, almost every sentence of it a mystery that can never be explained away.

Is Christmas still that? Or has it become a little too familiar, a little too common? Does Christmas after

having been part of our lives for so long now make perfect sense? Or does it still have the power to make us realize just how amazing our God is? In other words, does it still make us want to shout. "I can't believe that God loves us that much." So much that healing our broken world was and is his ultimate concern. Refuse to remain at a distance. Wanting instead to be in an intimate communion with all of creation. Chose not to simply appear to his sons and daughters but actually became one of them. Assuming a human nature and immersing himself fully in our journey. Refused to force himself into the word. Choosing instead to ask the cooperation of, the yes of a humble woman from an ordinary town in a sleepy corner of nowhere. Is

able to show us not simply who He is but who we are called to be. Came to us meekly, quietly, unassumingly, in a vulnerable way—showing us that true power is not what we think it is. Helped us realize that God doesn't act despite the world, despite his creation but actually through it—giving you and me a chance to cooperate with his plan and help transform world into the beautiful, loving, peaceful place He created it to be.

The mystery of Christmas teaches us all of that—reveals to us a God unlike any god ever thought of or imagined, reveals to us a God who human beings never could be possible.

Our God is the opposite of ordinary. The opposite of predictable. The opposite of disinterested. The opposite of vengeful. The opposite of distant. Rather, He's a God who wanted and wants to be near us, wants to be one of us, wants to guide us, wants to save us, wants to dwell with us—not just alongside us but within us—within every human heart open to His grace, open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. What a God we have!

And so, as you gather with family and friends and do all the things you usually do this day, all the usual traditions and all the usual foods and all the thanking God, prayers and songs, usual exchanging of presents—make sure you don't include the miracle of Christmas, the mystery in with everything else you've done year after year.

Rather, let's truly think about the meaning of this day—not just the meaning of that day long ago but the meaning it has for each of our lives in this time and place. For once you start to unpack the mystery, once you start to unwrap it—you'll find there is simply more and more mys-

see TI BIAG KEN PAMMATI p.12



The 2025 Christmas decorations are beautifully presented on the dais of St Joseph Church in Makawao.



Let's Talk Pinoy!

Dulce Karen Butay

And just like that, the last month of the year has arrived—December! Honestly, it feels like we were just scrambling to find Halloween costumes yesterday and now suddenly we're supposed to be cheerful, festive and pretending we're ready for the holidays. Time really needs to slow down and let the rest of us catch up!

December has always felt like a month wrapped in its own kind of magic. It's the time when familiar traditions return—stringing up lights, hearing the Christmas song on the radio and feeling that mix of excitement

and comfort only the holidays can bring. For me, December is full of small moments that mean a lot: the smell of warm food in the kitchen, late-night conversations with family and the simple joy of giving and receiving thoughtful gifts. Even as the year winds down, the holidays remind me to slow down, appreciate the peo-

ple around me, hold onto the memories making this season feel so special and believing no matter what the year has taken or given, there is still beauty in gathering, giving and beginning again.

Shout out to all the December babies! Happy birthday to Maricel Butay, Lilia Ross, Guadalupe "Oping" Bautista,

Kristina Angeline Cabbat, Estrelita Lampitoc, Emmanuel Baltazar and Anissa Lynne Marie Casabay. *Pada-pada kam nga kumablaaw ti naimbag nga panagkasangay yo amin!* (Happy birthday to all!) Happy, Happy birthday to you! (Tagalog) *Maligayang bati sa inyong kaarawan!* (Ilokano) *Naimbag nga panagkasangay mo!* (Ibanag) *Makapagayaya nga aggaw na nikeyana mu!* (Kapampangan) *Masayang kebaitan queca!* (Ilonggo) *Masadya gid nga adlaw sa imo pagkatawo!*

Let's see what's going on with our story this month and where Michael and Angel will be going next, shall we?

"ROBERT AND I met when I was sixteen," she begins. "I was working as a maid for a wealthy family in Ilocos. My mother's *gayem* (friend) was looking for young ladies who could work and do the household chores because she has visitors coming from America. Robert would always come and talk to me even when I'm doing my chores."

Angel blinks. "*Inay* ..."

Her *yena* (mother) *timan* (smiles) faintly, eyes distant. "He was charming in that quiet way. The kind that made you feel seen. I didn't know he came from a well-off family; he never spoke of it. We used to walk by the old pier, talk about dreams that were too big for the both of us."

She pauses, the corners of her *baba* (mouth) tightening. "When I found out I was pregnant, he had already gone back to the States. I tried to reach him but his letters stopped coming. I thought he'd changed his mind."

The air in the room seems to thin. Angel's *mata* (eyes) widens, her pulse quickening. "Wait—what are you saying?"

Lena takes a steadying breath. "By the time I learned he had written back, it was too late. The letters were sent to the wrong address. I thought he had forgotten me ... but he hadn't. Years later, I found out he'd tried to come back." Her *timek* (voice) breaks. "But I had already married your *Tatay* (father) by then."

Michael's face goes pale. "*Tio* (Uncle) ... *Tio* (Uncle) Robert ..." His voice falters. "He told me once—about someone he lost. Someone he said

he'd hurt without meaning to. He kept an old photo in his wallet. I never asked who she was."

Lena nods, *mata* (eyes) glistening. "It was me," she says simply.

Silence fell like mist—thick, heavy, full of meaning neither of them knew how to hold.

Angel stares at her *Ima* (mother), the *kalibutan* (world) narrowing to the sound of her own heartbeat. "Then ... does that mean—"

"*Hindi* (No)," Lena says gently, understanding before Angel could finish. "*Haan* (No), *anak* (child). Robert and I ... we never had *anak* (child) together."

Angel exhales shakily, relief and confusion tangling in her chest.

"But maybe," Lena continues softly, "Fate wanted you two to meet anyway. To remind us even after heartbreak, love finds a way to reach across years ... and heal what was left behind."

Michael looks at Angel and for a moment, the weight of their families,

their histories and their *puso* (hearts) merges into something fragile but undeniable.

The past found them—but so, perhaps, had the chance to begin again.

The call ends with a soft click, the screen fading to black. For a moment, neither of them moves. The room feels different now—heavier, yet strangely lighter too, as if the truth had peeled away something unspoken that had been hanging between them all along.

Angel sits still; her fingers curled in her lap. The silence hums softly, broken only by the faint buzz of the ceiling light. She can still hear her mother's voice echoing in her mind—*love finds a way to reach across years and heal what was left behind*.

Michael shifts, his *bores* (voice) barely above a whisper. "I didn't know," he says. "If I had ... I would've told you right away."

"I know," Angel murmurs, meeting his *mata* (eyes). They look different now—softer, searching. "*Indi*, (No). It's not your fault, Michael. None of

this is."

He gives a quiet, humorless laugh. "Maybe not. But it feels like I've been carrying someone else's story without even realizing it."

Angel's *korason* (heart) tightens. She reaches out before she can stop herself, her fingertips brushing against his hand. His skin is warm and for a heartbeat, the world steadies.

"Maybe that's not such a bad thing," she says softly. "Sometimes stories choose us for a reason."

Michael looks at her—then really looks. The distance once existing between them dissolves, replaced by something raw and honest.

"You sound like your *Nanay* (mother)," he says, a small *ngiti* (smile) tugging at his lips.

Angel *yuhom* (smiles) faintly. "She has a way of saying the right thing at the wrong time."

Aww ... okay, slight panic over so we can relax now. What a relief! But wait—could this be the beginning of what I think it is? You're thinking it too? I really hope so. Fingers crossed we're right this time!

Anyways that's all I have. Keep an eye out for my column in every issue. I'm Dulce, helping you to master your Filipino Languages. Like always, let's laugh, let's *making* (listen), and Let's Talk Pinoy! *Hanggang sa muli!* (Until next time!) *Ingat!* (Take care!) ✨

Dulce Karen Butay graduated from Maui High School and received her Associate in Arts degree in Liberal Arts from Maui Community College. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, specializing in **see LET'S TALK PINOY p.12**

English	Pilipino	Ilokano	Cebuano	Ilonggo	Ibanag	Kapampangan
Mother	Nanay / Inay	Nanang / Inang	Inahan	Nanay	Yena	Ima
Uncle	Tito	Tio	Tiyo	Tiyo	Tio	Tangku
Friend	Kaibigan	Gayem	Bai	Amigo / Amiga	Kofun	Kaluguran
No	Hindi	Haan	Awan	Indi	Dili	Indi
Heart	Puso	Puso	Tutu	Puso	Kasingkasing	Korason
World	Mundo	Lubong	Kalibutan	Kalibutan	Bida	Yalu
Voice	Boses	Timek	Tingog	Tingog	Boses	Bosis
Eyes	Mata	Mata	Mata	Mata	Mata	Mata
Smile	Ngiti	Isem	Pahiyum	Yuhom	Galo	Timan
Father	Tatay / Itay	Tatang / Itang	Amahan	Tatay	Yama	Tata

2025 Recap ...

from p. 7

Iowa homecoming game in the rain! We stood up the whole game and USC had a thrilling come-from-behind victory thanks to the heroics of Hawai'i-born Jayden Maiva, USC's star quarterback. Fight on! (The Dinengdeng & Pinakbet column authored by Gil Keith-Agaran in October 2025—and reprinted in November 2025—highlighted class reunions.)

Speaking of sports, it's been a great—and not so great year in sports. Each year, I travel to the Ninth Island



The new supreme pontiff, Pope Francis XIV.

to place a bet on USC, the Raiders, the Bengals (for Gil), and the Seahawks (for Bessy) to win it all. Sadly, USC lost early so they never made it to the College Football Playoffs. The Raiders—even with a rested Pete Carroll as their new coach—failed miserably. (I never liked Geno Smith when he was a quarterback in Seattle. When we saw the Raiders go against the Cowboys on Monday Night at Alle-

giant Stadium, Geno was so bad the Cowboys thought they would end up in the Super Bowl!) Likewise, the Bengals were out once their quarterback smoking Joe Burrow got hurt again. (Geez, it all starts with protecting (and rushing) the quarterback.) Surprisingly, the Seattle Seahawks (Sea--Hawks!) are still in the running. We saw them lose by only two points at Sofi Stadium to the Los Angeles Rams. Only two points despite four interceptions by the newly acquired quarterback Sam Darnold (and yes, he's a USC alum that we saw play against Notre Dame before he turned pro.) When we returned home in November, I joked with Bessy that we would travel to Seattle in early December to watch the rematch—and we did! That overtime game was a thriller, with Seattle erasing a 16-point deficit in the fourth quarter!

But the greatest thrill of all was the Dodgers repeating as World Champs! Seven games including an eighteen-inning game! When we traveled to LA in November, I just had to get me an Ohtani jersey (I already have a Fernando Valenzuela jersey who pitched when I was attending law school in LA during the early 1980s.) The sad and crazy thing, however, was I did not place a bet on the Dodgers. Hmmm. I must place a bet for a three-peat. I also didn't place a bet on my beloved Lakers so maybe they'll be champs this year. Not too late to jinx them and place a bet on them. Before I forget, I will say that

see 2025 RECAP p.16

Ti Biag ken Pammati | from p. 10



Great granddaughter Keria Cadelinia as mother Mary at their Christmas play at St. Elizabeth Church in Aiea on O'ahu.

tery to be in awe of, more and more mystery to be grateful. And don't try to explain it! Embrace it! Live it! You'll find out, that is part of the future God has in store for all of us.

Have a Merry and Blessed Christmas, and Happy New Year 2026.

Jesus, I trust in You! Amen! ✨

Deacon Patrick Constantino retired from active Ministry on July 1, 2022. He is still a Deacon in good standing with full faculties to perform all sacraments in the Diocesan of Honolulu Hawai'i. Constantino has been ordained for thirty-seven years. He is the first Filipino Deacon in the Diocesan of Honolulu. Prior



to his ordination, Constantino was in government—first appointed in 1966 as Assistant Sergeant of Arms by the Speaker of the House Elmer F. Cravalho. When Cravalho became Maui's first Mayor, Constantino became his Executive Assistant—the first of Filipino ancestry. Later, Constantino became the first County Treasurer of Filipino ancestry and the first County Grants Administrator and Risk Manager of Filipino ancestry. Constantino is married to his lovely wife Corazon for sixty-four years. They are blessed with four children, eleven grandchildren, and fifteen great grandchildren.



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Let's Talk Pinoy! | from p. 11

Accounting, from the University of Hawai'i - West O'ahu. She is currently the Administrative Officer at the County of Maui, Department of Finance. Butay is the owner of Maui Balsamic Vinegar and is a licensed Resident Producer of Life Insurance with World Financial Group and an In-



dependent Consultant of Saladmaster. She is a part of Saladmaster's Travel Club and won an all-expenses paid trip to Cancún, Mexico. Butay has traveled to Texas, the Philippines and Thailand as one of the delegates from Island Healthy Solutions, a Saladmaster dealer on Maui.

Learn about AI in 2026

Liza A Pierce of "A Maui Blog"

The upcoming new year causes us to pause, reflect and look ahead with hope and curiosity. As we step into 2026, conversations about technology—especially Artificial Intelligence—are everywhere. Here at Kwento-Kwentuhan in the *Fil-Am Voice*, let us explore the topic of AI in a simple, approachable way. Rather than approaching AI with fear or confusion, this new year offers an opportunity to understand it more clearly and thoughtfully, starting with why it matters in our everyday lives.

Artificial Intelligence, often called AI, is a term we hear almost daily now—on the news, on social media and even in casual conversations. For many people, it still feels confusing or intimidating, as if it belongs only to tech experts or big corporations. But AI is quickly becoming something much more familiar. In fact, it may help to think of AI the same way we think about electricity or the internet: a powerful technology that quietly becomes part of everyday life.

Throughout history, certain inventions changed not just one industry but nearly everything around us. These are known as "General Purpose Technologies." They are tools that improve over time, become more affordable as more people use them and spark new ideas, businesses and ways of living.

Electricity is one of the best exam-

ples. Before it, daily life looked very different. Once electricity became widely available, it transformed homes, businesses, transportation and communication. The internet followed a similar path generations later, changing how we connect, work, shop and share information. Other examples include steam power, which fueled the Industrial Revolution, and the printing press, which made knowledge accessible to everyday people for the first time.

Artificial Intelligence is now following a similar path.

Today, AI is already working behind the scenes in ways many of us do not even notice. It helps doctors analyze medical images, assists banks in detecting fraud, supports students with personalized learning tools and helps businesses save time by automating routine tasks. Even our smartphones, navigation apps and online recommendations rely on AI in some form.

One reason AI is advancing so quickly is it continuously improves. As computers become faster and more data becomes available, AI systems learn and adapt at an incredible pace. Unlike older technologies that required long periods of human-led development, AI can refine its performance through use, making it more capable over time.

As with past General Purpose Technologies, AI is also reshaping the economy. New jobs and indus-



Picsart's AI image generator was asked by Lawrence Pascua: "Create an anime image of president Donald Trump taking over the oil field extractions in Venezuela," and it replied by producing this image.

tries are emerging while existing roles continue to evolve. History shows us while technological change can feel uncertain at first, it often leads to increased productivity and new opportunities for those willing to learn and adapt.

What makes AI especially unique is its ability to assist in its own development. While previous technologies relied entirely on human innovation, AI can help analyze data, test ideas and improve systems faster than ever before. This means the pace of change may be quicker than what we experienced with earlier technological shifts.

Looking ahead, AI is expected to influence nearly every sector—from healthcare and education to transportation and small business operations. It has the potential to help

solve complex challenges, improve efficiency and support creativity, if used thoughtfully and responsibly.

AI is not something meant to replace human connection or decision-making. Instead, it can serve as a tool—one supporting people, strengthening communities and opening doors to new possibilities. Like electricity and the internet before it, AI will shape the future. The most important thing we can do as we enter 2026 is stay informed, curious and grounded in our shared values as we move forward together.

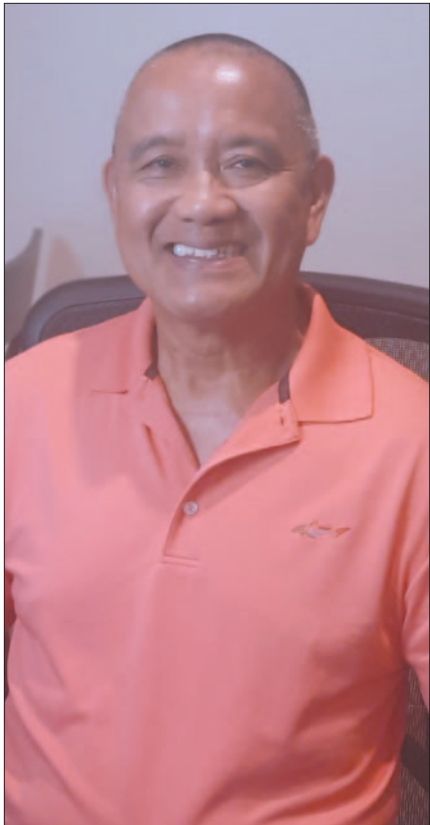


Liza Pierce of *A Maui Blog* is an *Interactive Media* enthusiast. She started blogging in 2006 and she loves talking story online and spreading aloha around the world. She's been living on Maui since 1994 and considers Maui her home. A wife, a mother, a friend and so much more. She loves Jesus; Maui Sunsets Catcher; Crazy About Rainbows; End Alzheimer's Advocate. Her life is full and exciting here on the island of Maui. Liza is currently the Digital Media Specialist with Hawai'i Life Real Estate Brokers. She is the author of the book *Maui 2021 and Beyond*.



AI transforming technology and society
IMAGE COURTESY LIZA PIERCE

Sakada Offspring



Jeffrey Dela Cruz



Lydia and Jeffrey Dela Cruz with daughters Amber Dela Cruz-Manezes and Summer Dela Cruz-Parkes.



Tranquilino and Adelina's wedding day.

Supportive parents are often described as a source of strength, inspiration and unconditional love. President Franklin D. Roosevelt said this about supportive parenting: "We may not be able to prepare the future for our children, but we can at least prepare our children for the future." This is exactly what the *Sakada* parents of this month's featured offspring did. They definitely prepared their son Jeffrey Dela Cruz for his future.

Jeffrey was born in July 1955 in Pu'unēnē, Maui, Hawai'i. He attended St. Joseph School in Makawao, Maui High School at Hāmākua Poko and Maui Community College, Technical Division. He graduated with an Associate Degree in Architectural Drafting.

In the past, Jeffrey worked at Araki U-Drive Rental, Robert's U-Drive Car Rental, A&B Commercial Company in the home planning department, for Maui County in the land use and codes administration as plans examiner, and as a self-employed architectural designer and consultant. Currently, he is designing homes, additions to existing residences, commercial buildings, apartments, churches and office buildings. Some of the major projects he worked on are the Binhi at Ani Filipino Community Center, Door of

Jeffrey F. Dela Cruz

Lucy Peros | PHOTOS COURTESY DELA CRUZ 'OHANA

Faith Church, Valley Isle Fellowship Church and the Kīhei Commercial Center in addition to smaller commercial projects.

Jeffrey is married to Lydia P. Dela Cruz. She retired from Bank of Hawai'i as a consumer sales specialist. They have two daughters, Amber J. Dela Cruz-Manezes and Summer L. Dela Cruz-Parkes.

Amber graduated from Oregon State University with a Bachelor of Science, minoring in Business Administration. She is Sr. Program Manager for Recludix Pharma. She is married to Aaron N. Manezes.

Summer graduated from the University of Washington with a BA in Business Administration with emphasis in Marketing & Human Resource Management. She is an administrator for Humane Center Design at Engineering, and Budget Analyst. She is married to David J. Parkes. They have two children, Wyatt and Dyson Parkes.

In 2006, Jeffrey and Lydia were selected by the Maui Filipino Community Council and Binhi at Ani as the Mr. & Mrs. Centennial awardees. This was

during the 100th Anniversary of the Filipinos being in the United States. They also received the Dance Director's Award and the Rotating Instructor's Award.

Jeffrey is the Assistant Dance Director of the Hawai'i Ballroom Dance Association, a member of the Maui Filipino Chamber of Commerce and a member of the Bantay Association of Maui (President), Maui Son's & Daughter's Chrysanthemum Festival (Dance Choreographer), Maui AJA Veterans (Dance Choreographer), American Lung Association (member) and Children's Justice Center (member).

Jeffrey and Lydia enjoy traveling the world, teaching dance classes and engaging in charity walk activities.

Jeffrey's siblings are Reuben Dela Cruz, Darryl Dela Cruz and Melissa Dela Cruz Shishido.

Reuben retired from UH Maui College. His wife Katherine is self-employed. Their children are Ian Dela Cruz, Kaitlin Watasaki and Carly Dela Cruz. Ian (a quantitative analyst at Columbia Bank in Portland, Oregon) and his wife Irina Belasarova (Intel)

have two children: Nikita Dela Cruz and Yanisei Dela Cruz. Kaitlin is married to Curtis Watasaki (a Financial Planner). They have two children Benek and Marin Watasaki. Carly is an Operations Manager (The Table Less Traveled).

Darryl Dela Cruz is an Executive Chef at The Forest in Duke, North Carolina. He is married to Kat Dela Cruz, a Realtor. They have two children Michaela and Ellie Dela Cruz.

Melissa Dela Cruz Shishido has retired from HECO. She is married to Blaine Shishido (retired from the State Department of Health). They have three children: Taylor Shishido (a Strategic Network Manager with Dandelion Health), Ty Shishido, (a Design Engineer with Opto international) and Trey Shishido.

Jeffrey's father, Tranquilino Dela Cruz came to Hawai'i as one of the thousands of *Sakadas* in 1946. They came by boat from Aringay, La Union, Philippines. Upon arrival, he worked for the pineapple plantation (Maui Land & Pine) as a laborer. During this time, he lived in Cornmill Camp in Pukalani. After a couple of years, he returned to the Philippines to get married to Adelina Dela Cruz and they both returned to Hawai'i in the 1950s by plane. Hawai'i was still a territory



Jeffrey with brothers Darryl and Reuben Dela Cruz and sister, Melissa Dela Cruz.



Jeffrey and Lydia with daughters and sons in law, Aaron N. Manezes and David Parkes.



Jeffrey and Lydia with grandsons Wyatt and Dyson Parkes.

when Jeffrey was born. Hawai'i did not become a state until 1959. The Dela Cruz family, however, still had access to medical service when they needed. Then the family moved to Hāli'imaile Camp, where Maui Land and Pine was located, so it was easier to go to work. Jeffrey was born in 1955, Ruben in 1957, Darryl in 1959 and Melissa in 1965.

After returning to Hawai'i, both of Jeffrey's parents worked for ML&P as laborers because this was the only job they knew. Tranquilino eventually got promoted to be a truck driver and finally a supervisor or luna. He held that supervisory position until he passed. Adelina retired from ML&P. The company provided housing for the employees, so at least they had a roof over their heads.

Jeffrey reminisced about the good old days: *Life was simple but good. Not too many things to worry about. Our Dad taught all of us how to work hard. We delivered the Honolulu Advertiser in the camp to make extra money. When it rained, our Dad did not bother to wake us up but went to deliver the newspaper himself. He also liked politics. Whenever there was a rally for the election for a Mayor for Maui County, he always went to support the candidate at that time (Elmer Cravalho). Why? Because there was always steak and rice for the occasion. At age 15, I had to accompany him to a rally, knowing that he will not be able to drive home. Luckily, I had a driver's permit. Our parents, especially Dad taught us valuable lessons to live by,*

that is to work hard, do not steal, be good to people, be honest, etc.

We all went to private school. It was not cheap but no matter how much money our education cost, they made sure that we had a good schooling and always had food on the table. Mom made breakfast and lunch for school every day. Mom and Dad alternated cooking for dinner. Dad could cook some good food, food which we have not seen or tasted today. One time, Dad captured some doves in a bird trap. We did not know what he was going to do. Upon asking, he said that he was going to clean and deep-fry the birds for eating. We said whaaa! But it was good. Never again did we question his 'culinary' knowledge and expertise.

“Life was simple but good. Not too many things to worry about. Our Dad taught all of us how to work hard.”

— JEFFREY DELA CRUZ

Dad was the Boss. Everything he said (as long as it was not wrong) goes. If we did not listen, we would get what today would be considered 'child abuse.' But we learned. Mom was the second Boss. She was easy. No problem.

Every year at Christmas time, we had to attend the Christmas party at the clubhouse where there was a play of the Nativity. All of us siblings were in the play. Christmas gift: apple, orange and some nuts in a brown bag. During New Years Eve, it was an adult affair. Mom and Dad used to come home late after a good night of fun, drinks and food. Yep! Those were the days, simple, fun and good memories with our parents.

Here's Jeffrey's reflection on his parents: It's been forty-six years since Dad passed and 22 years since Mom passed and I have always wondered



Dela Cruz family photo

what it would be like if they did not do all of those things that helped us to succeed in life. My siblings and I have all had a good education, good jobs, wonderful and lasting marriages; over-

all we've had a good life. We hoped that Dad would be able to see grandchildren but I'm sure that he is smiling and knows that we have done good.

see DELA CRUZ p.16

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2025 Recap ...

from p. 12

the transfer portal, the NIL (name, image, likeness) payments and other stuff have destroyed college football. Of course, there will always be politics in sports.

Politics continued to take center stage this year. In the motherland, it's been super crazy. Former president Rodrigo Duterte was allowed to be brought to The Hague to face charges relating to extrajudicial killings as part of Duterte's drug war. Actually, "allowed" is too soft a word as the Marcos administration transported Duterte to The Hague. This led to a split in the Marcos family between President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr. and his sister, Senator Imee Marcos. The split was so severe Imee broke away from Bongbong's party list for the mid-term elections and Imee sided with the Duterte's. Imee was re-elected, however, but she was in the lower tier. (The April 2025 issue covers the Imee-Bongbong split). Recently, after all the chaos of corruption, Imee has publicly accused Bongbong and the First Lady of being drug addicts. Whew!

And we thought American politics was bad with the current Republicans vs. Democrats situation. President Trump decided to rule via Executive Orders, with many challenging established principles such as citizenship by birth. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion became a hot topic (see the March 2025 issue) throughout the country while the threat of tariffs was constant

(see the February 2025 issue) as well as ICE raids (see the Editorials in the May 2025 and July 2025 issues). And despite Trump's claim he would end it, the war in Ukraine continues. Recently, the Epstein files has become a hot issue for President Trump and the Republicans. The Democrats, perhaps with Hawaii's Senator Brian Schatz leading them in the future (see the May 2025 issue), continue to fence with President Trump, with the Democrats hoping the 2026 mid-term elections will restore Democratic party majorities in the Senate and/or House.

In local politics, the death of Councilmember Tasha Kama in late October (see the November 2025 issue) brought the Council to a standstill with a 4-4 split between the more conservative contingent (Lee, Yukimura, Cook and U'u-Hodgins) and the Pono block (Paltin, Sinenci, Johnson and Rawlins-Fernandez). Despite this split, the Council passed the controversial Bill 9 (see the Editorial in the August 2025 issue) which would phase out the TVR (transient vacation rentals) on the Minatoya list. (My friend, the late Richard Minatoya who was the Deputy Corporation Counsel that authored the opinion, would later complain how he hated that it became known as the "Minatoya list." Fight on forever, Richard.) The 4-4 Council could not agree on Tasha's replacement (there were three candidates: Kauanoe Batangan (nominated by U'u-Hodgins), Carol Lee Kamekona (nominated by Sinenci) and Virgilio



Taste that lechon! The delicacy was served at the 2025 Annual Barrio Fiesta, hosted by Binhi at Ani at the community center in Kahului.

yes, politicians. At the Fair, the lines were long. On social media, folks complained about the long lines and the prices. We tend to complain about every little thing, huh? And despite the lack of a Ferris wheel and some favorite food like flying saucers (when my brother Rogelio was active with the Veterans group he would be a key honcho), the Fair was a success.

And not to be outdone, the 56th Annual Barrio Fiesta® was another resounding success. (See May 2025 issue.) Thousands cramped the Binhi at Ani Filipino Community Center for the two-day affair to experience Filipino culture, Filipino games,

and yes, Filipino food. Heading the cultural aspect was the crowning of the 2025 Miss Barrio Fiesta Kyrach Navarro Pagdilao and her court—First Princess Jordyn-Leeah Pagaduan and Second Princess Sofiya Marey Dominique Quines Cartagena. And yes, the food included the favorites of *adobo*, *pansit* and *halo halo*. You could even find *dinardaraan*, *igado* and *kwek kwek*. But my favorite was to sample the *lechon* cooked by Bobby Sales and sponsored by the Magbual family in memory of their parents. Oh, the skin was so crispy! Diet? Forget about it—that's for next year!

Agcolicol (self-nominated). With the Council unable to agree, the decision fell to Mayor Richard Bissen, Jr. who appointed Batangan in December—but only after Bill 9 was passed—probably because Batangan had expressed he would not vote for Bill 9. The issue of housing, especially after the Lahaina wildfire, continued to be a hot topic. The Ho'okumu Hou program sought to assist those who lost their homes during the 2023 wildfires (See the August 2025 issue). The public relations campaign for the program was hot and television ads featured Mayor Bissen—perhaps as a precursor to his re-election campaign which is now in full swing with at least three unions (Ironworkers, ILWU and HGEA) issuing early endorsements. The coconut wireless has Bissen facing opposition from a current elected official.

2025 also saw the election of a new Pope after the death of Pope Francis. Pope Leo XIV became the first Pope born in the United States. (See May 2025 issue). The Pope is an avid Chicago White Sox (baseball) fan. Throughout the year, Pope Leo XIV became a constant critic of President Trump, criticizing him on topics such as the war in Ukraine and immigration.

In early October, Maui County saw the return of the Maui Fair, which was last held in 2019. (See the Dinengdeng & Pinakbet column in the September 2025 issue.) Kicking off the Fair weekend was the parade featuring the bands, queens, businesses and

Assistant Editor **Alfredo Evangelista** and his wife **Bessy** dressed in cultural attire during the 56th Annual Barrio Fiesta®, together with Manny Pacquiao. ✨

And as the year comes to a close and as we say Happy New Year, many Filipino families will gather round to remember those who have gone before us, to give thanks for the blessings and to remember the reason for the season—the birth of Jesus Christ to save us sinners. Merry Christmas everyone—and Happy New Year!

Assistant Editor **Alfredo Evangelista** and his wife **Bessy** dressed in cultural attire during the 56th Annual Barrio Fiesta®, together with Manny Pacquiao. ✨



Dela Cruz ...

from p. 15

Mom did see the grandchildren and she also knows that all is OK. My siblings and I talk about Mom and Dad when we have a get together and reminisce. We then get silent, let a tear or so drop but not show it and take a deep breath and talk about the future. Finally, when we have the chance, we visit the site where they are laid to rest, say a silent prayer and look towards the heavens for comfort knowing that they both are looking down upon us and nodding to each other saying, we did our job and we did it well.

Well done indeed! ✨
Lucy Peros is a re-

tired schoolteacher, having taught at St. Anthony Grade School and Waihe'e Elementary School. Her late parents, Elpidio Cachero Cabalo (a 1946 Sakada) and Alejandra Cabudoy Cabalo both worked for Maui Land and Pine Company. Lucy enjoys being with other retirees in the Enhance Fitness Program under the Department of Aging three times a week. Whenever she can, she joins other Waihe'e School retirees when help is needed at the school.

Lucy also devotes some of her time as Lector and choir member at both Christ The King Catholic Church in Kahului and St. Ann Catholic Church in Waihe'e. She enjoys being with her granddaughters after school. She also enjoys writing, reading and gardening in her spare time.





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