

TABLE TALK - 09/27/09

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 Sunday, 27 September 2009
 Last Updated Monday, 28 September 2009

The National Convention: Re-Discovering the Essence of JCI

Vol. I, No. 06 * 27 September 2009 By JCI Sen. REGINALD T. YU, ITF Trainer, Inspirational Speaker and Author, Communicator After immensely enjoying an almost seven-month reprieve from writing, a text message from my former training coach and friend, (Charter President) Cerwin Eviota, suddenly sent shivers up my spine one recent morning and requested me to continue my column for the JCI Cebu-Mactan Channel website – which was due that evening! Due to my increasing commitments with family, work, and other organizations (Yes, I STILL have a life after JCI), I was determined to decline the offer.

Nevertheless, since it was “THE BIG BOSS” who made that sheepish request, I had to finally acquiesce. So, here I am again, dusting off my keyboard and cranking up those old synapses for another round of “Table Talk.” But let me caution my eager “fans” (ay, meron ba?) that my presence in this great website shall be erratic, at best, as I am now finding it extremely hard to juggle my priorities… let alone write a column.

But I hope to make the best out of the situation, while I still have this chance. And what greater event can I write about than the up-and-coming National Convention?

THE 61ST NATIONAL CONVENTION: AMOS TAREN SA PUERTO PRINCESA!

The JCI Philippines National Convention is one of the most-awaited affairs that highlight an extensive plethora of programs for the year. It is a yearly gathering for JCI members all over the country, which gives them the opportunity to come together and, for four days, fully experience the privileges of what the JCI movement has to offer. There are leadership seminars to enrich one’s personal and professional competence, contests to hone one’s speaking skills, and most importantly, the fellowships to experience the camaraderie and sense of family, united behind a common bond of friendship and a mission of world peace. But more than just the pageantry associated with grand affairs such as this, the JCI Philippines National Convention is also a fascinating looking glass into the young Filipino leadership-in-action, which mirrors the ever-changing trends, political culture, and vagaries of the times that have shaped the dynamics of an organization for more than six decades.

In less than two weeks, more than a thousand JCI members are expected to converge at Puerto Princesa, Palawan, for the 61st JCI Philippines National Convention. From October 6 to 11, delegates shall be ostentatiously inundated with several exciting activities, such as the “Amos Taren Amazing Race” at the Aventura Beach, a badminton tournament at the Provincial Engineering Office, and a Torch Parade from the Capitol Park Square to the City Coliseum. All these, apart from the time-honored programs of plenary sessions, training seminars, the annual Temiong Awards ceremonies, and the presidential ball, make for a truly memorable affair.

Known for having one of the most bio-diverse islands in the country, the island shall usher delegates to some of the most-renowned natural seascapes and landscapes on face of this planet. For a minimal fee, JCI members can explore the Calauit Game Preserve and Wildlife Sanctuary; discover the seven lakes surrounded by craggy limestone cliffs of the Coron Reefs in Busuanga, go island-hopping at the almost unadulterated beaches Hunda Bay, or just be awestruck at the jaw-dropping Subterranean River National Park.

Aside from the traditional Fellowship Nights, hosted this year by JCI Quezon City “Capitol” and JCI Magalang “Mekeni,” events shall include a mangrove planting project for incoming JCI Local Presidents, a trade fair exhibit and an on-the-spot photo contest.

“The Palawan NatCon will be one of the best, if not the best and most memorable one,” promised Celesta Anna "Teng” R. Formoso, this year’s Convention Director and past JCI Philippines National Vice-President, as she reiterated that, “it is an honor for Palawan to host a national gathering of this magnitude for the first time.”

This show of support is also echoed by the island’s officials, headed by no less than Puerto Princesa City Mayor Edward S. Hagedorn (who shall grace the Opening Ceremonies), and Palawan Governor Joel T. Reyes (who shall illuminate the Presidential Ball), as they pledged their support to assure the success of the convention. With Senator Francis Joseph “Chiz” G. Escudero to highlight the affair as keynote speaker, the 61st National Convention shall indubitably mark more than half-a-century of providing exciting development opportunities for young active citizens – a milestone of sorts for the intrepid hosts of nature’s “last frontier.”

THE 1st NATIONAL CONVENTION: A JOURNEY BACK INTO THE POSSIBLE

The anticipation over this year's National Convention reminds me of another important milestone in JCI Philippines' history. A little over six decades ago, gallant members of a new youth movement — which was composed of a handful of fledgling entrepreneurs — had vague dreams of holding, sometime in an uncertain future, a JCI national convention in a country ravaged by the ugly vestiges of the Second World War. There, from amidst the bedlam of wanton death and destruction, new beginnings of hope for lasting peace and prosperity was already being envisioned by a few young men in business — a prescience made possible in the newly-blazed trail of youth service — as palpably embodied in Junior Chamber.

The JCI movement in the Philippines started because of a crying need of the postwar years — the need for an opportunity by which the young men could find their own niche in society and serve the community, the need of an effective medium by which they could show their elders what they can accomplish by themselves and, in the process, gain valuable training and experience for their future role in our nation.

Thus, on Friday, February 11, 1949, close to three hundred young JCI members from twelve newly-established local organizations around the country converged at the Fiesta Pavilion of the newly-rebuilt Manila Hotel, not only to celebrate the culmination of a year of successful achievements, but also to exchange ideas for fostering the work they so auspiciously started. Fired up by copious enthusiasm, delegates arrived in waves — eager to map out the basic plans on a national scale a program of service.

All in all, this one dozen JCI local organizations — constituting the initial nucleus of JCI Philippines — were represented by their respective presidents and officers, as follows: Ramon V. del Rosario (President, JCI Manila), Atty. Fulvio C. Pelaez (President, JCI Cebu), Miguel A. Suarez (President, JCI San Pablo), William A. Yotoko (President, JCI Iloilo), Atty. Guillermo A. Villazor (Vice-President, JCI Bacolod), Alfonso B. Gatchalian (President, JCI Zamboanga), Guillermo E. Torres (President, JCI Davao), Leon A. Hontiveros (President, JCI Capiz), Antonino F. Martinez (President, JCI Cabanatuan), Atty. Ricardo L. Rosal (President, JCI Cavite), Antonio Benedicto (President, JCI Tacloban), and Godofredo P. Reyes Jr. (President, JCI Lucena).

Hosting the convention was the 195-member strong delegation of JCI Manila, headed by Convention Chairman Jose N. Mayuga, then recently-appointed Regional Director of Junior Chamber International. He took great pains in personally welcoming the provincial delegates, as they fell in droves to attend this milestone event. "This is a(n) historic day for all" (JCI members), he proclaimed during the first Plenary Session at the Champagne Room of the Manila Hotel. "It is significant and far-reaching, for whatever we do here will bear on all" (JCI members), here and abroad. "For the first time, we are gathered here — to weld all" (JCI members) into one single national body. "We are here, bound by a common cause and creed, to achieve that end."

The snowballing JCI movement in the country did not escape the watchful eyes of Philippine government officials. Manila Mayor Manuel C. de la Fuente personally rendered the convention's welcome remarks, while the Opening Ceremony was graced by no less than His Excellency, Philippine President Elipido R. Quirino, who served as the conference's guest-of-honor. In his speech, President Quirino extolled the JCI members: "This is the age of the common man" (but) this is also getting more and more to be the age of the young man. He commended the JCI members "for their public spirit and their capacity for action which have won recognition not only here in the Philippines but also abroad."

Because of their capacious manpower at that time, JCI Manila adroitly organized the Convention into functional committee groups. The Reception, Hospitality and Fellowship Committee was headed by Jose Q. Tabora; the Publicity Committee was chaired by Arturo M. Domingo; the Invitations Committee was handled by Ramon V. del Rosario; the Transportation Committee was managed by Felipe C. Monserrat; the Registration Committee was led by Asterio G. Favis; the General Program and Souvenir Committees were jointly manned by George B. Brodie and Francisco D. Trinidad; the Housing Committee was run by Lauro D. Marquez; the Decorations Committee was administered by Carlos D. Arguelles; the Finance Committee was overseen by Romeo S. Villonco; the Photographic Records Committee was arranged by Bienvenido B. Eraña; while the Luncheons, Dinner and Cocktails Committee was coordinated by Jack Preysler, Carlos G. Palanca Jr., Robert S.W. Dee, Daniel U. Tan, George Lee, and Eugenio J. Puyat.

It is interesting to note that, unlike today's general plenary sessions where parochial matters within the JCI national organization are usually discussed, the very first plenary meeting tackled much broader concerns which affected the national weal. Incidentally, Minister Thomas Lockett, then Chargé d'Affaires of the United States Embassy and Honorable Jose C. Zulueta, then outgoing Secretary of the Interior (and later, Senate President), were invited to speak before the general assembly on matters of government and industry. A panel of session coordinators during the meeting was headed by Ramon V. del Rosario (for General, National Expansion, International Relations, National Headquarters, Finance), Gregorio M. Feliciano (for Specific Resolutions, Constitutions, Bylaws, Memberships, Elections, Awards), Roberto S. Benedicto (for Politics), Rafael R. Estrada and Teodoro V. Kalaw (for Economics), Salvador F. Neri (for Statement of General Principles), Leonardo T. Siguion-Reyna (for Labor Management), and Charles F. Gebhart (as

Official Adviser).

After the session, a cocktail party in honor of the delegates was rendered at La Tondeña, Incorporated, courtesy of Carlos G. Palanca Jr. at his office in Echague, Quiapo, Manila; while a dinner-dance capped the evening at Secretary of Instruction Manuel V. Gallego's residence in Quezon City.

By Saturday, February 12, 1949 — the second day of the convention — the Constitution and Bylaws of JCI Philippines was drafted and unanimously approved, all committee reports rendered were approved, the charter National Officers were elected, and national committee chairmen were appointed. The first thirteen permanent committees were formed which included: Governmental Affairs, Public Health, Public Education, Labor Management, Civic Improvement, Safety, Sports and Recreation, Publications, International Relations, "Sell the Philippines," National Headquarters, National Expansion, and Finance.

Ramon V. del Rosario, the charter president of JCI Manila, was unanimously elected to head the newly- created organization as National President. Other members of the National Board were Eugenio J. Puyat (Manila) as National Executive Vice-President, Hernani B. Concolluela (Iloilo) as National Vice-President for International Affairs, Carlos G. Palanca Jr. (Manila) as National Treasurer, Rafael R. Estrada (Manila) as National Secretary-General, Antonino F. Martinez (Cabanatuan) as Regional Vice-President for Luzon, Fulvio C. Pelaez (Cebu) as Regional Vice-President for Visayas, and Ramon G. Morada (Davao) as Regional Vice-President for Mindanao. Jose J. delos Reyes, JCI Manila's full-time Administrative Officer, was appointed Executive Secretary.

In his impromptu inaugural address to the membership, National President-elect Ramon V. del Rosario reflected the general pulse of the JCI movement during those nascent years. "We need not urge determination in carrying out our common tasks ahead," he said. "We have seen that determination displayed in all the projects we have undertaken. We need not urge more enthusiasm and spirit. Today's gathering is proof of our enthusiasm and spirit. But we do urge more generosity without time. For we have found that to serve, we have sometimes to make sacrifices — generous, unselfish sacrifices — in order to attain our goal. Of generosity we can never give enough. Fortunately, we have found an invaluable reward for all our efforts — the reward of self-satisfaction."

Immediately after this celebrated session, the delegates proceeded to Malacañang Palace's park grounds where a cocktail-dance in their honor was tendered by President Quirino. Thereafter, a premier exhibition of Victoria "Vicki" Manalo-Draves, a Filipina-American diver who won the Olympic gold medal in the London games for the three-meter springboard and 10-meter platform events in 1948, was invited by JCI Manila to demonstrate her winning form in honor of President Quirino.

On Sunday, February 13 — the final day of the convention — the program was highlighted by a morning Mass at the De La Salle College grounds in Manila. University of the Philippines chaplain, Fr. John Delaney, S.J. was not only invited to celebrate the Mass, he also provided an inspirational message to the delegates.

The final session was held by the newly-elected National Board of Directors and National Committee at the Champagne Room of the Manila Hotel. As the convention came to a close at around 6:00 p.m., no less than Ambassador Carlos P. Romulo rendered the session's closing remarks.

The first National Convention was such an historic milestone in the history of the organization that JCI Philippines is still living the kind of world these first convention delegates have made — albeit much softly. As key legislation and organization was established, it set the direction on the overall structure and operations of the JCI national organization in the many decades to come.

JCI Manila delegates pay a courtesy call to Carlos P Romulo as their closing speaker for the NatCon

While much of the zeal and passion which ignited those first delegates have slowly diminished over the years, their achievements continue to spark a chronic, yearning noise, which could only be silenced by a more blaring clamor from a new generation of young JCI leaders who are willing to take the same enormous risks and triumph again — all in the name of "active citizenship."

I fervently hope that THAT day would come.