

NOCVA News

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION of CHAMORRO VETERANS in AMERICA
NATIONAL OFFICE NEWSLETTER



FROM the FOUNDERS

Cel Aguigui, Larry Cruz, and Frank Blas

We begin 2014 with an ambitious agenda as we look for ways to leverage NOCVA's non-profit status to better serve Chamorro veterans. Interest in what we're doing continues to grow beyond our greatest expectations, and we're gratified that more Chamorro veterans are stepping up and getting involved, especially once they understand what NOCVA is all about.

We are busy laying the groundwork to build NOCVA into an advocacy organization that will stand the test of time. Our long-term strategic plan must meet not only the needs of our senior veterans, but also appeal to the younger generation of veterans and active duty servicemembers who will help us continue our mission far into the future.

While we are eager to look forward, it's important that we take stock of what we've accomplished so far. We are proud of the achievements we've made, especially being a grassroots effort, entirely dependent on limited personal funds and driven by the energy and talent of a small but dedicated core group of volunteers.

In this issue, we feature NOCVA's highlights of the last year. Some are significant milestones in NOCVA's history, some will help us create valuable connections for the future. All these efforts – both large and small – build NOCVA's influence and reputation. It takes time and constant effort to get results. As we continue to grow, we are more determined than ever to make NOCVA a powerful force for change.



photo by Lauren Rogen

Cel Aguigui and Frank Blas, U.S. House Veterans Affairs Committee meeting. Washington. DC



Larry Cruz, outreach meeting, San Diego

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NOCVA ANNUAL REVIEW – 2013 HIGHLIGHTS

1. Expanded network of regional coordinators to include 25 regional coordinators in 12 states and Guam
2. Coordinated first NOCVA mini-conference in Las Vegas, NV; over 50 Chamorro veterans (representing Arizona, California, Maryland, Montana, Nevada, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington State) met to network and set goals and priorities
3. Gained approval for NOCVA to operate as a non-profit organization, exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code; now classified as a “public charity,” NOCVA can legally initiate and conduct fundraising efforts
4. Recognized by 32nd Guam Legislature with resolution submitted by Hon. **Aline Yamashita** honoring NOCVA’s efforts to serve as the voice of Guam and CNMI veterans and their families
5. Met with House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman (**Jeff Miller-FL**, 1st District) staff to discuss issues facing Chamorro veterans in the 50 states, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands; presented position paper outlining areas of concern, particularly regarding access to healthcare and medical center issues
6. Established Chamorro Veteran Womens Advisory Group (CVWAG) at the national level, led by **Terri Guevara Smith**, to ensure that NOCVA fully represents the interests and concerns of Chamorro women veterans
7. Appointed **Frank H. Flores** (founder of Project Guiding Light [PGL] Veterans Volunteer Advocacy Group) as Technical Adviser for Veterans Affairs Benefits and Compensations. By partnering with PGL, NOCVA will ensure that Frank’s legacy of selfless service to assist Chamorro veterans will continue
8. Created informational NOCVA brochure *Working Together To Empower Chamorro Veterans* to provide quick, fact-filled overview of NOCVA’s purpose, mission and vision, and methods for achieving goals
9. Further developed “Chelu, We Remember You” Special Tribute to include a translation in Chamorro (an initiative of the **Washington State chapter**) for use in honoring Chamorro veterans at funerals and memorial services
10. Launched national office newsletter, *NOCVA News*, to improve communication between national office, regional coordinators, members, and friends of NOCVA

OFFICIAL VISITS/ACTIONS

RECOGNITION for NOCVA

In October 2013, NOCVA national coordinators **Cel Aguigui** and **Larry Cruz** met with Maryland's Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary **Edward Chow, Jr.**, to introduce NOCVA (which is based in the Maryland-Virginia-Washington, DC, metro area) and to raise awareness about the needs of Chamorro veterans.

The meeting was initiated by NOCVA's founding members (both residents of Maryland) and is part of ongoing efforts to develop connections with national and regional organizations and individuals who can help NOCVA build and increase its influence as a national advocacy organization.

Sec Chow, named to the post in 2009, recently sent a letter commending NOCVA's efforts to unite Chamorro veterans and pledged future support to expand awareness in Maryland.

The VA Department maintains offices in all 50 states and territories of the U.S. For the nearest location to your area, see <http://www.va.gov/statedva.htm>



Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs

Office of the Secretary

MARTIN O'MALLEY
GOVERNOR
ANTHONY G. BROWN
LT. GOVERNOR
EDWARD CHOW, JR.
SECRETARY

January 27, 2014

To the National Organization of Chamorro Veterans (NOCVA):

On behalf of the State of Maryland and the Department of Veterans Affairs, I would like to extend my congratulations and welcome NOCVA to our network of Veteran Service Organizations. As the first national level organization to unite Chamorro Veterans, NOCVA's efforts are historic. The MDVA congratulates NOCVA on the achievement of your first national conference, held in March 2013. Service to the veteran community is the foundation of MDVA and our Department looks forward to supporting NOCVA's efforts to expand awareness in the State. Welcome to Maryland!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Edward Chow, Jr.".

Edward Chow, Jr., Secretary
Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs



Edward Chow, Jr

photo from Maryland State Archives

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

NOCVA Western Regional Coordinator Conference

Thu, 27 Mar 2014
9:00 – 5:00

Sons and Daughters Guam Club of San Diego
334 Willie James Jones Ave, San Diego, CA

POC: Greg Camacho, Regional Coordinator, San Diego Chapter
email: germanian2@msn.com
phone: 915-740-7606

Chamorro Hands in Education Links Unity (CHE'LU) Chamorro Cultural Festival

Sat, 29 Mar 2014
10:00 – 6:00

Market Street Plaza, 310 Euclid Ave, San Diego

Dedicated to strengthening the Chamorro native language, culture, and health through education, this cultural fest attracts the largest gathering of Chamorros in the United States

www.CheluSD.org

CHELU, WE REMEMBER YOU

We at the national office mourn the passing of our friend and comrade, **Frank H. Flores**. Over the past year, we heard many stories of how Frank helped Chamorro veterans in processing their VA claims. He eagerly helped everyone who sought his help, without conditions or exceptions. He believed that sharing and helping others was the highest form of love and friendship that one can give. And he applied that principle until the end. It is perhaps this quality that defined him throughout his life. He practiced this spirit of giving even when he was suffering and in pain.

In your short time with NOCVA, we deeply felt your presence and contribution. Your exemplary and remarkable life will always be remembered and will make us stronger. Your legacy and inspiration will guide us as we move forward and expand our organization. You truly captured the spirit of why NOCVA exists.

We will work hard to honor your legacy. Adios, until we meet again.

- Cel, Larry, and Frank

Frank H. Flores
25 Oct 1950 – 15 Dec 2013



photo submitted by Tony S. Duenas

*Frank is the first Chamorro honored by a Congressional resolution for his accomplishments in helping over 1,000 Chamorro veterans process their VA claims. At the request of NOCVA, Frank's Congressional representative, Hon. Dina Titus – NV (1st District), submitted the following statement commemorating the life of **Frank Flores** into the Congressional Record on 19 December 2013:*

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the life of Frank Flores, known lovingly by his friends and family as "Apo," Cabeza," or "Tagasi," who dedicated his life to his country and his family.

... Mr. Flores founded the Project Guiding Light Veterans Volunteer Advocacy Group, an organization focused on helping veterans navigate the benefits process at the VA. The group works closely with veterans and other Veterans Service Organizations to help veterans receive all of the benefits they have earned.

Mr. Flores worked extensively with the National Association of Chamorro Veterans in America (NOCVA), an organization seeking to unite and organize Chamorro veterans across the United States to advocate on behalf of the Chamorro people. The organization, which was founded in 2011, has focused its efforts on honoring Chamorro veterans, and serving as their voice in Washington. The Chamorro ancestry traces back to Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands.

Mr. Flores spent his entire life serving others, and helped thousands of veterans through his tireless advocacy and dedication. His legacy will endure and serve as an example to us all.

Vicente T. "Ben" Blaz
14 Feb 1928 – 8 Jan 2014

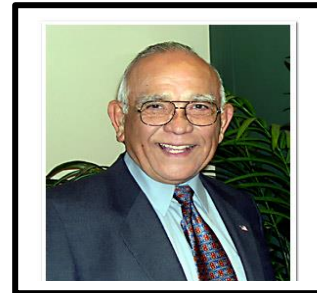


photo from www.bisitagum.com

NOCVA pays tribute to the distinguished service of **Gen. Ben Blaz**, the first Chamorro to become a general in the U.S. Armed Forces. He served in the Marine Corps from 1950-1980, attaining the rank of Brigadier General. In 1984, he was elected the Delegate to Congress from Guam, serving from 1985-1993. In retirement, he wrote about his experiences and established the Bisita Guam website (www.BisitaGuam.com) to document historical and cultural aspects of Guam.

Gen. Blaz's life and achievements are a source of inspiration and pride for Chamorros. We are thankful for his legacy of military and public service and for being a strong advocate for issues important to Chamorros. For more information about his life and career, visit:
http://everly.tributes.com/our_obituaries/Vicente-T-Blaz-99000120

NOCVA NATIONAL OFFICE STAFF

Celestin “Cel” Rivera Aguigui, *Founder/National Coordinator*

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Francisco “Frank” Dumanal Blas, *Founder/National Coordinator*

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NOCVA is a non-political, non-partisan national advocacy organization based in the Nation’s capital that seeks to unite and organize Chamorro veterans and their supporters to leverage their collective political influence in the United States to work on behalf of the Chamorro people – in the US, in Guam, and in the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI).

To become a member, visit our website at www.nocva.org to download a membership form.

Please address comments
and suggestions to *Editor*

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