

The Filipino American Community



THE FILIPINO AMERICAN COMMUNITY OF HAMPTON ROADS

Relatively few people are aware that the first Filipinos journeyed to America's west coast as early as 1565, four decades before English settlers arrived at Jamestown. However, those travelers did not stay in North America and it was only after 1906 that Filipinos began to migrate permanently across the Pacific in large numbers. Hampton Roads has been fortunate to be one of the major destinations of this migration. This chapter focuses attention on the approximately 45,000 Filipino Americans in our midst.

Following the Spanish-American War and the United States' colonization of the Philippines, employers in Hawaii and on the western mainland actively recruited Filipino workers. By 1940, almost 50,000 Filipinos lived in the mainland United States. In the years after World War II and the establishment of Philippine political independence, thousands more followed in their footsteps, notably military servicemen and their brides, medical professionals and family members of other Filipino Americans. Thus began a rich history of Filipino American community building throughout the United States, including Hampton Roads.

According to the 2000 census, 2.36 million people of Filipino ancestry now live in the United States. As Table 1 reveals, nearly 45,000 of this population reside in Hampton Roads, making our region home to one of the country's most concentrated Filipino American communities. Outside Hawaii and California, only the Filipino American communities in New York City, Chicago and Seattle are larger. This is a striking distinction for Hampton Roads, since (in contrast to these other urban centers) few other sizable communities of immigrants have made their homes here.

Nevertheless, as Table 2 reports, in recent decades Hampton Roads has not been a major magnet for immigrants. In 2000, only 4.42 percent of the region's population was foreign-born, compared to 22.41 percent in Northern Virginia and 8.07 percent in Raleigh-Durham.

Almost one-quarter of Hampton Roads' foreign-born population hails from the Philippines, easily outnumbering every other national group. As Table 3 illustrates, in 2000, 16,671 residents of Hampton Roads were born in the Philippines – more than the five next largest national groups combined (from the United Kingdom, Germany, Korea, Vietnam and Canada). In 2005, more than 20 percent of the foreign-born residents of Hampton Roads who became naturalized citizens and legal permanent residents of the United States came from the Philippines.

Filipino Americans reside in every city and county of Hampton Roads, comprising at least 2.79 percent of our region's population and at least 4 percent of the population in Virginia Beach (see Table 1). "At least" is the appropriate terminology, because Filipino Americans, like many other ethnic groups, often decline to indicate their ethnic background when given the opportunity to do so by the census. Community leaders believe that 15,000 to 25,000 people of Filipino ancestry did not indicate their background in the 2000 census; we adopted the lower estimate in Table 1.

Why have so many Filipinos elected to make Hampton Roads their home? How has the Filipino American community changed the economic, political and cultural face of our region? These are the questions we'll explore below, beginning with a look at the history of Filipino settlement in Hampton Roads. Then we'll examine the Filipino American community today, including its demographics and most influential institutions. We'll conclude with a survey of the new ways that second-generation Filipino Americans are promoting their cultural identity at the beginning of the 21st century.

**TABLE 1
FILIPINO AMERICANS IN HAMPTON ROADS**

	Total Population	Filipino Alone	Percent Filipino Alone	Filipino Alone or in Any Combination	Filipino Alone or in Any Combination %
Chesapeake	199,184	2,029	1.02%	2,637	1.32%
Currituck County	18,190	33	0.18%	62	0.34%
Franklin	8,346	8	0.10%	10	0.12%
Gloucester County	34,780	61	0.18%	91	0.26%
Hampton	146,437	657	0.45%	981	0.67%
Isle of Wight County	29,728	22	0.07%	33	0.11%
James City County	48,102	163	0.34%	210	0.44%
Mathews County	9,207	7	0.08%	8	0.09%
Newport News	180,150	1,083	0.60%	1,526	0.85%
Norfolk	234,403	4,125	1.76%	5,182	2.21%
Poquoson	11,566	28	0.24%	43	0.37%
Portsmouth	100,565	424	0.42%	612	0.61%
Southampton County	17,482	7	0.04%	11	0.06%
Suffolk	63,677	185	0.29%	250	0.39%
Surry County	6,829	5	0.07%	5	0.07%
Virginia Beach	425,257	14,553	3.42%	17,429	4.10%
Williamsburg	11,998	67	0.56%	80	0.67%
York County	56,297	276	0.49%	406	0.72%
Filipinos NEC				15,000	
HAMPTON ROADS	1,602,198	23,733	1.48%	44,576	2.78%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: <http://factfinder.census.gov>. Note: Participants in the 2000 census could select one or more racial categories, or none. Many Filipino Americans appear to have chosen not to indicate their ethnic background.

TABLE 2
FOREIGN-BORN POPULATIONS IN HAMPTON ROADS AND ELSEWHERE

Cities and Counties	Total Population	Foreign-born Population	Foreign-born Population %
Chesapeake	199,184	5,971	3.00%
Currituck County	18,190	254	1.40%
Franklin	8,346	62	0.74%
Gloucester County	34,780	653	1.88%
Hampton	146,437	5,778	3.95%
Isle of Wight County	29,728	335	1.13%
James City County	48,102	1,993	4.14%
Mathews County	9,207	198	2.15%
Newport News	180,150	8,610	4.78%
Norfolk	234,403	11,634	4.96%
Poquoson	11,566	340	2.94%
Portsmouth	100,565	1,595	1.59%
Southampton County	17,482	51	0.29%
Suffolk	63,677	1,180	1.85%
Virginia Beach	425,257	28,276	6.65%
Williamsburg	11,998	622	5.18%
York County	56,297	2,931	5.21%
HAMPTON ROADS	1,595,369	70,483	4.42%
Northern Virginia	1,645,598	368,790	22.41%
Richmond	806,313	40,158	4.98%
Charleston	549,033	18,257	3.33%
Charlotte	2,115,090	119,354	5.64%
Jacksonville	1,243,005	67,264	5.40%
Raleigh-Durham	1,549,822	125,060	8.07%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: <http://factfinder.census.gov>

**TABLE 3
FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION OF HAMPTON ROADS: BY PLACE OF BIRTH**

	HAMPTON ROADS	Chesa-peake	Curri-tuck	Franklin	Gloucester	Hampton	Isle of Wight	James City	Newport News	Norfolk	Poquoson	Ports-mouth	Suffolk	Virginia Beach	Williams-burg	York
Philippines	16,671	1,393	13	0	85	556	31	151	608	3,401	37	307	143	9,635	9	302
United Kingdom	4,465	329	69	8	88	433	30	198	434	538	25	75	130	1,878	55	175
Germany	4,381	363	4	6	99	561	43	243	991	464	57	178	139	899	20	314
Korea	3,129	279	0	11	62	339	7	114	944	211	35	41	0	669	9	408
Vietnam	2,716	152	19	0	17	410	0	31	543	300	0	55	18	1,076	55	40
Canada	2,568	333	17	0	18	169	40	189	253	232	24	11	69	1,020	61	132
Mexico	2,164	270	42	26	34	203	10	18	310	369	17	70	6	718	7	64
India	1,976	110	9	0	26	237	0	69	202	247	14	0	54	774	55	179
China	1,961	149	20	0	5	81	30	93	198	462	28	46	53	637	64	95
Jamaica	1,873	226	0	0	0	259	0	51	197	525	5	12	23	499	0	76
Japan	1,531	121	8	0	0	139	12	25	264	156	35	15	19	633	0	104
Panama	1,295	112	0	0	22	97	7	24	414	164	0	43	17	327	0	68
Italy	1,072	116	7	0	24	120	0	50	131	146	7	15	0	437	7	12
Other Caribbean	977	82	0	0	0	208	0	0	57	222	0	33	16	331	18	10
Trinidad & Tobago	932	93	0	0	0	199	0	0	85	210	0	22	21	300	0	2
Spain	794	37	0	0	0	44	0	11	47	80	0	6	21	539	0	9
Colombia	739	69	0	0	0	18	7	36	74	147	13	10	24	324	0	17
France	707	26	0	0	17	64	13	24	179	96	6	17	14	219	0	32
Cuba	690	34	5	0	12	88	0	46	93	98	5	21	7	261	7	13
El Salvador	647	40	0	4	0	0	0	67	89	103	0	34	0	283	7	20
Greece	639	32	0	0	9	35	0	29	53	112	3	12	0	264	15	75
Netherlands	625	31	0	0	19	47	7	21	24	55	0	0	30	363	9	19
Taiwan	622	17	0	0	0	27	0	30	62	150	5	20	0	193	35	83
Poland	621	40	0	0	6	56	8	22	38	128	7	25	4	251	0	36
Thailand	567	35	0	0	10	101	0	0	102	89	0	37	35	127	0	31
Dominican Republic	566	23	0	0	0	56	17	18	94	177	0	41	0	140	0	0
All Other	15,306	1,459	41	7	100	1,231	73	433	2,124	2,752	17	449	337	5,479	189	615
Totals	70,234	5,971	254	62	653	5,778	335	1,993	8,610	11,634	340	1,595	1,180	28,276	622	2,931

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: <http://factfinder.census.gov>

History

For much of the 20th century, Hampton Roads and the Philippines held one important thing in common – both were home to the world’s largest bases maintained by the U.S. Navy. More than any other factor, the Navy has been responsible for bringing Filipino immigrants to Hampton Roads.

The U.S. Naval Station at Subic Bay was established in 1901, and during its 90-year lifespan, it became one of the Philippines’ largest employers. The U.S. Navy recruited Filipinos directly into its ranks as stewards and mess attendants as early as 1903, a practice that continued and expanded even after the islands’ political independence. In the early Cold War era, tens of thousands of Filipinos applied to join the U.S. Navy each year; up to 2,000 were admitted annually. (After 1973, this number was reduced to 400, although higher-ranking positions became available to Filipino servicemen as well.) The Navy offered Filipino enlistees a lucrative, steady income and a path toward U.S. citizenship. Many of these enlistees were stationed at naval bases in Hampton Roads, and it was here that they began to set down roots.

“From the mid-1960s to the late ‘80s, Navy housing was community for many Filipinos,” recalls Raymond Perez Obispo in “In Our Aunties’ Words,” a recent oral history project sponsored by the Hampton Roads chapter of the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHHS). “Like Wadsworth Homes, Navy communities like Benmorrel Housing, Camp Elmore, Merrimack Homes, Camp Allen and Harper’s Square were neighborhoods located near naval facilities in Norfolk and Virginia Beach. Each served as ground zero for the families of enlisted men and served as a transitional stop post until promotions created income that would lead to a necessary component of the American Dream, the single-family home.”

Filipino women came to Hampton Roads as the wives of both American and Filipino servicemen, although many of these Filipinas were medical professionals who had already spent months or years elsewhere in the country before settling here. Their paths to our region were facilitated by the landmark Immigration Act of 1965, which eliminated national-origin quotas, emphasized family reunification and encouraged the migration of skilled workers in certain preferred professions, including health services.

“Since the 1970s, the Philippines has been the major source of foreign-trained nurses in the United States,” writes University of California, San Diego Professor Yen Le Espiritu, “with at least 25,000 Filipino nurses arriving between 1966 and 1985.” The majority of these nurses were women, and a small cohort of them found employment at hospitals in Norfolk and Virginia Beach, as well as other medical institutions in our region.

Was Hampton Roads welcoming to its earliest Filipino immigrants? Those interviewed for “In Our Aunties’ Words” have fond memories of their early years in the region, and in retrospect they are satisfied with their decision to settle here. Yet, they and other first-generation Filipino Americans typically can recall some unpleasant instances of discrimination as well. Because their skin color was often too dark to be considered “white,” Filipino immigrants learned that they were not always welcome in all neighborhoods or workplaces. Sometimes their accented English became a source of misunderstanding and prejudice. Filipinos migrated to Hampton Roads just as the civil rights movement of the 1960s began to transform the American South. Filipino Americans profited from the movement’s accomplishments, but they also continued to feel some of the lingering prejudices that have similarly affected African Americans in our region, well after the formal end of segregation.

The Filipino American Community Today

Filipino Americans have become a diverse and vital presence in the Hampton Roads community. According to the 2000 census, nearly half of those claiming Filipino ancestry in our region were not born abroad. Thus, a large population of second-generation (and some third-generation) Filipino Americans now resides in Hampton Roads. **The region’s Filipino Americans are no longer employed chiefly in the armed services or as medical professionals. Table 4 indicates that the distribution of Filipino American workers throughout all sectors of our regional economy largely parallels that of the entire Hampton Roads population.**

To date, no comprehensive list of Filipino American businesses in our region has been compiled, although a 2007 supplement to the directory Filipino Yellow Pages U.S.A. does identify 40 different enterprises. The densest cluster of these businesses is

located on Lila Lane in Virginia Beach. Hampton Roads' "Little Manila" is home to a Filipino martial arts school, travel agency, video store and several other establishments that cater to the region's Filipino American population.

Economic evidence has consistently demonstrated that most immigrants exert a positive influence on their new communities of residence. Immigrants tend to be younger and work longer hours than the population at large and they become net contributors to the tax and welfare systems within a few years.

These assertions appear to hold true for the Filipino American population of Hampton Roads, which on average is younger and better educated than the region's overall population. According to the 2000 census (see Table 5), the median age of those who identified themselves as all or part Filipino was 30 (three years younger than the median age of all Hampton Roads residents) and six years younger than the typical Virginian of Filipino background. Only 5.85 percent of our region's Filipino Americans are 65 years and over, compared to 9.8 percent in the general population. **Filipino American residents of Hampton Roads are more likely to have graduated from high school, and this gap in education widens at the post-secondary level. Whereas 23.71 percent of all Hampton Roads adults possess a bachelor's degree or higher, 32.21 percent of Filipino Americans boast the same distinction.** Filipinos elsewhere in Virginia are even better educated – 48.6 percent of those 25 years or older have earned a bachelor's degree or better.

While it may be dangerous to highlight some individuals in a community as diverse

Employment Status	Filipinos Alone or in Any Combination	Population
In labor force (population 16 years and over)	14,707	702,295
Rate of civilian unemployment	3.65%	5.50%
Men (16 years and over) in labor force	74.34%	75.63%
Women (16 years and over) in labor force	67.85%	61.91%
Employed Civilian Population by Industry		
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	0.16%	0.29%
Construction	3.64%	7.34%
Manufacturing	15.67%	10.06%
Wholesale trade	1.74%	2.53%
Retail trade	17.89%	12.77%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	4.23%	4.76%
Information	3.04%	3.08%
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	5.05%	6.63%
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	7.21%	9.99%
Educational, health and social services	20.15%	20.54%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	10.58%	8.65%
Other services (except public administration)	4.44%	5.11%
Public administration	6.22%	7.97%
Income in Past 12 Months		
Total population	28,773	1,342,293
Households	7,024	492,403
Average household size	3.13	2.60
Median household income (dollars)	51,509	42,533
Per capita income (dollars)	16,120	20,047
* Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach, York County only		
Source: U.S. Census Bureau: http://factfinder.census.gov		

TABLE 5
FILIPINO AMERICAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS: HAMPTON ROADS

General Characteristics	HAMPTON ROADS*		VIRGINIA BEACH		VIRGINIA	
	Filipinos Alone or in Any Combination	Selected Hampton Roads Cities	Filipinos Alone or in Any Combination	Population	Filipinos Alone or in Any Combination	Population
Total population	28,773	1,342,293	17,429	425,257	72,704	7,332,608
Median age (years)	30	33	31	33	36	37
Under 5 years	7.78%	7.13%	7.28%	7.20%	8.10%	6.90%
18 years and over	71.37%	73.34%	71.74%	72.51%	74.10%	75.30%
65 years and over	5.85%	9.80%	5.81%	8.45%	7.00%	11.20%
Social Characteristics						
High school graduate or higher (population 25 years and over)	87.58%	85.22%	88.74%	90.45%	93.20%	85.40%
Bachelor's degree or higher (population 25 years and over)	32.21%	23.71%	33.20%	28.11%	48.60%	33.20%
Foreign-born	55.31%	4.83%	54.93%	6.65%	57.21%	9.87%
Speak a language other than English at home (population 5 years and over)	57.77%	8.13%	58.49%	10.28%	59.50%	12.70%
Housing Characteristics						
Single-family owner-occupied homes (per 1,000 of the population 18 and over)	234.62	275.96	252.00	297.51	274,900	212,300
Median home value (dollars)	111,867	110,123	114,700	123,200		
* Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach, York County only						
Source: U.S. Census Bureau: http://factfinder.census.gov						

and talented as the Hampton Roads Filipino community, a variety of members from this community told us that among the most prominent Filipinos in the area are (in alphabetical order):

- Jay Bernas, Virginia Beach planning commissioner and city of Virginia Beach project manager for the 31st Street development and the Sandbridge sand replenishment.
- Nancy Dimano, president and CEO of Best and Dependable Home Care and member of the Virginia Maternal and Child Health Council and the Catholic Charities of Eastern Virginia.
- Dr. Juan Montero, retired from a private surgical practice in Chesapeake, founder of the free Chesapeake Care clinic, board member of Physicians for Peace, and recipient of a dozen or more public service and professional awards.
- Louie Ochave, owner of Chicho's, Crazy Charlie's and Live restaurants in Virginia Beach and a director of the Virginia Beach Restaurant Association.
- Dr. Cynthia Romero, family practice physician and president of Chesapeake General Hospital's medical staff in 2006; cited as an Outstanding Professional Woman of Hampton Roads in 2005.

- Edwin Tirona, CEO of Dynamic Systems Integration, a voice-video-data-security firm headquartered in Virginia Beach.
- Emmanuel Voces, attorney and a director of the Virginia Beach Community Development Corp.

Employers such as Sentara Healthcare and the Virginia Beach City Public Schools have recently addressed shortages in our region's skilled labor force by sponsoring workers from the Philippines. Filipino nurses and teachers have been attractive candidates for international recruitment because of their solid professional training and command of the English language, as well as their ability to integrate easily within our region's existing Filipino American community.

Such skills have enhanced Filipino American incomes in all sectors of the regional economy. Table 4 reports that in 2000, the median Filipino American household income in Hampton Roads was \$51,509, 21 percent higher than the region's \$42,533 average. However, the per capita income of Filipino Americans (\$16,120) was lower than that of the general population (\$20,047). This disparity appears to reflect the larger size of Filipino American families, as well as the higher labor force participation rates of Filipino American women.

The Filipino American contribution to the Hampton Roads economy is substantial, although at least a small portion of this income is remitted back to family members and other institutions in the Philippines, a typical phenomenon in immigrant communities. In addition to individual remittances, local organizations like Mission of Mercy regularly raise thousands of dollars for disaster relief and other charitable initiatives in the Philippines. A 2003 study by the Asian Development Bank estimated that \$4.7 billion is remitted annually from the United States to the Philippines, an average of nearly \$2,000 for every Filipino American. If the same relationship applies in Hampton Roads, then more than \$90 million flows from the region to the Philippines each year.

In the last five years, Hampton Roads' Filipino Americans have asserted a voice in the political arena that better corresponds to their economic muscle. Ron Villanueva's mobilization of Filipino American voters played a decisive role in his 2002 election (and 2006 re-election) to the Virginia Beach City Council. Fellow Filipino Americans Tina Sinnen and Lyndon Remias won election to a Virginia Beach Circuit Court clerkship and the school board in 2003 and 2006, respectively.

After more than four decades of Filipino settlement in our region, what has enabled these successful runs for public office? Villanueva believes that a combination of factors was in play, including dedicated campaigning and the opening of favorable election opportunities. The continued growth of the Filipino American electorate played a critical role, as did the corresponding expansion of this electorate's financial resources. Finally, it seems significant that the path-breaking political candidates were all second-generation Filipino Americans with a broad degree of public experience and community involvement, outside as well as within the Filipino American community. Villanueva, for example, has strong Republican Party ties and had served successfully on the Old Dominion University Board of Visitors.

What issues motivate our region's Filipino American voters? Villanueva and Remias emphasize that, given the size and diversity of the Filipino American community, its political interests largely reflect those of the region as a whole, although the community has placed great emphasis upon increased representation in local government. Araceli Suzara, director of the Filipino American Center at Old Dominion University, notes that Hampton Roads' Filipino American community is distinctive for its political conservatism. Nationally, Filipino American voters have tended to favor the Democratic Party, but Republican politics has proven more attractive to Filipino Americans in Hampton Roads. Arguably, some of this may be attributed in part to the strong regional influence of the U.S. Navy.

Veterans of the U.S. Navy have been among the most politically active members of the Filipino American community. A particularly important issue is the decades-long struggle to award full U.S. veterans' benefits to Filipinos and naturalized Filipino Americans who fought with the United States during World War II. In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt formally merged the Philippine Commonwealth Army with the U.S. Armed Forces stationed in the Philippines, but five years later Congress declared Filipinos ineligible to receive U.S. veterans' benefits. In Hampton Roads today, the regional chapter of the National Federation of Filipino American Associations and the Filipino American Veterans of Hampton Roads are dedicated advocates of veterans' rights. This year, representatives of both organizations lobbied the region's legislators for the support of two bills pending before the 110th Congress – the Filipino Veterans Equity Act, and the Filipino Veterans Family Reunification Act (which would expedite the immigration process for the children of Filipino war veterans).

If Filipino Americans have only recently claimed a larger role in Hampton Roads political affairs, their institutional presence within our region has a much longer history. The Filipino Women’s Club of Tidewater was founded in 1962, and since then dozens of Filipino American associations and interest groups have coalesced. Some of these organizations (like the Philippine Medical Association of Southeastern Virginia and the Virginia Beach Filipino American Tennis Association) seek to unite all Filipino Americans with a common profession or interest, while others more exclusively promote a particular linguistic tradition or regional identity. The Republic of the Philippines is an exceptionally diverse country comprising more than 7,000 separate islands; over 100 different languages and dialects are spoken there. In Hampton Roads, groups such as the Pampango Language Club and the Cebuano-Speaking Association of Tidewater unite speakers of a common language, while organizations like the Bicol Association of Tidewater bring together those who trace their roots to a particular Philippine region.

The Three Centers

Within the last 15 years, three influential Filipino American centers have opened their doors in Hampton Roads. All were the products of years of planning and fundraising within the Filipino American community. With distinct individual emphases, each of these centers seeks to promote Filipino culture and traditions, as well as provide a gathering place for the Filipino Americans of our region. These centers reflect the desire of Filipino Americans to unite and celebrate their heritage, but also a certain degree of divisiveness as well.

SAN LORENZO SPIRITUAL CENTER

The first of these institutions to be completed was the San Lorenzo Spiritual Center, located on Indian River Road in Virginia Beach. The center, which opened in 1994, was established through the support of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond and the donations of local Filipino Americans. The majority of Filipinos are Roman Catholic, a religious affiliation dating back to Spain’s colonization of the Philippines in the late 16th century. Upon settling in Hampton Roads, Filipino Americans became loyal adherents of Catholic parishes in our region, but they also sought an established means to observe the numerous celebrations and holy days that are unique to Philippine Catholics. The San Lorenzo Spiritual Center (named after the first Filipino saint) was an inspired solution to this demand – the first center of its kind in the United States.

Intended to complement rather than to replace affiliation with existing Catholic parishes, the San Lorenzo Spiritual Center provides a site for special masses, fiestas, youth activities and other Filipino American gatherings. Amelia Aguirre, San Lorenzo’s interim administrator, estimates that between 100 and 120 people attend the center’s services each Wednesday evening – some traveling from as far away as Smithfield and Williamsburg. Highlights of the center’s calendar include the annual Mayflower Festival and the Simbang Gabi, a nine-day series of evening (or early morning) masses held before Christmas Eve.

The work of the San Lorenzo Spiritual Center suffered disruption in 2004-05, when a handful of its members accused the center’s founding spiritual leader, the Rev. Pantaleon Manalo, of financial and other improprieties. Roman Catholic Church authorities did not find Rev. Manalo guilty of theft or other wrongdoing, but nonetheless relieved him from his post, in order to place the center more closely under the supervision of the Diocese of Richmond. The controversy received considerable media attention and represented a rare moment of public dissension in the regional Filipino American community. A minority of San Lorenzo members who were unhappy with the diocese ruling withdrew their support from the center, which now finds itself in a phase of reorganization and renewal. The construction and landscaping of a new meditation garden on the center’s grounds is currently under way.

THE FILIPINO AMERICAN CENTER AT OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

In 1998, Old Dominion University became host to the first academic center on the East Coast devoted to Filipino Americans. The Filipino American Center, which is located within the university’s College of Arts and Letters, was made possible through gifts approximating \$100,000 from regional community leaders. Dr. Juan Montero, the recently retired Chesapeake surgeon, was the spearhead for this development. The center has since become an important resource for the university and the broader Hampton Roads community.

The Filipino American Center’s director, Araceli Suzara, estimates that around 450 Filipino American students are currently enrolled at ODU. The center provides a site for these and other students to study, hold meetings and learn more about Filipino

culture. The center has sponsored a wide array of on-campus activities, including lectures, concerts, film screenings and introductory Tagalog classes. Filipino American studies courses offered for credit by the Department of English and the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice are also promoted by the center.

The Filipino American Center's outreach is not limited to the Old Dominion campus. Representatives of the center respond regularly to requests from Hampton Roads residents for information about the Philippines or Filipino Americans. According to Suzara, a key mission of the center is to work with and bring together the many different Filipino American groups that coexist in our region. Thus, the center has helped to coordinate Simbang Gabi masses at the San Lorenzo Spiritual Center and other Catholic parishes throughout Hampton Roads, as well as to create the curriculum for K-12 language and heritage classes taught at the Philippine Cultural Center of Virginia and Old Dominion's Virginia Beach Higher Education Center. Special events that appeal to the entire Filipino American community, such as an evening of classical Kundiman music in February, help to raise funds for the center's continued operation.

PHILIPPINE CULTURAL CENTER OF VIRGINIA

The Philippine Cultural Center of Virginia (PCC) opened its doors in 2000, although the earliest dreams and plans for its construction date back many years. In 1976, the Council of United Filipino Organizations of Tidewater (CUFOT) was established to link together six different Filipino American organizations in Hampton Roads (today there are 18 participating groups). CUFOT chairman Dr. Manuel Hipol emphasizes that the creation of a cultural center for all of the region's Filipino Americans was a primary goal of the council from its inception. The "Mrs. Philippines" pageant became an important early fundraiser for the project, and land was purchased along Baxter Road in Virginia Beach in the early 1980s. Donations for the center gradually accumulated, accompanied by some disagreements within the Filipino American community as to how the project and funds were being managed. A decisive milestone for the project was reached in 1999, when 32 families agreed to serve as guarantors of a \$988,500 loan that enabled the center's construction to begin. (As of January 2007, more than half of this loan had been repaid.)

Today the PCC is a 14,000 square-foot facility that serves the entire Hampton Roads community. It can be arranged as a theater or a ballroom, and it is reserved regularly by Filipino American and numerous other groups for weddings, dances, religious services and other special events. The PCC hosts several annual pageants, and it provides a regular meeting place for the member organizations of CUFOT. On Saturday mornings, youth between the ages of 5-18 gather at the PCC to participate in the School for Creative and Performing Arts, a volunteer institution that promotes the music, dance, language and folklore of the Philippines among Hampton Roads' youngest Filipino Americans.

The Second and Third Generations

Because of the circumstances and timing of Filipino settlement in Hampton Roads, much of the Filipino American community today falls largely into two cohorts: first-generation Filipino Americans between the ages of 55-70 who emigrated from the Philippines, and second- and third-generation Filipino Americans between the ages of 25-40 who were born and raised in the United States. The elder cohort established and continues to play a defining role in the community's most prominent institutions. These institutions were formed to promote and preserve Filipino cultural traditions abroad, as well as to provide a social support network for recent émigrés.

Our region's second- and third-generation Filipino Americans typically participated in the youth activities and other events sponsored by their parents' organizations, but most do not speak a Philippine language. Many have visited the Philippines only for brief family vacations. Involvement in the Filipino American community was a critical part of their upbringing, yet they feel in many ways more American than Filipino. Until recently, the public face of the Filipino American community had been dominated by their parents, a circumstance that is now changing, as members of the second generation have matured and established their own families and careers. The activities of Hampton Roads' second- and third-generation Filipino Americans emphasize a uniquely Filipino American (as opposed to Filipino) identity; these individuals are also technologically savvy. For them, community building is as likely to occur online as in a meeting hall or cultural center.

YOUNG FILIPINO-AMERICAN PROFESSIONALS OF HAMPTON ROADS

The most influential grouping of our region's second- and third-generation Filipino Americans is the Young Filipino-American Professionals of Hampton Roads. YFP was established in fall 2002 by a core group of young professionals active in the local chapter of the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) and other community initiatives. They sought to create a new organization that would speak more directly to the needs of 20- and 30-something Filipino Americans, particularly the desire to reconnect with old friends and acquaintances, and to create new opportunities for social and professional networking.

Today YFP sponsors a wide array of activities – including socials, an annual induction ball and a series of “Business 101” seminars that address topics such as home buying and starting a small business. Among the most active aspects of YFP is its online community, which is hosted at the Web site myfamily.com. On any given evening, dozens of YFP members log on to chat, share photos and post invitations and announcements. When not online, YFP members (who are also participants in CUFOT) gather at the Philippine Cultural Center of Virginia, which hosts many of their meetings and events. As stated recently in the Virginia Beach Beacon by YFP founding member Edwina Bergano, “We needed to bridge two generations together and establish dialogue between them.” To this end, YFP has helped to coordinate cross-generational initiatives like the FANHS oral history projects, and the 2007 BizNet Expo, which showcases local Filipino American businesses.

BLOGS, VLOGS AND PODCASTS

Thirty-three-year-old Nestor Lunasin is YFP chairman and a successful Web site designer. One evening a week, however, he assumes the role of Sterno, “master geek” of the Sini-Gang. Since June 2005, the Sini-Gang (consisting of Sterno and friends L-Boogy, Gamma Ray, Pinoy Playboy and Aloha Al) has recorded a weekly podcast that currently boasts around 500 subscribers in Hampton Roads and around the world. According to the group's Web site, the podcast represents “Filipino-American life in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia” and offers “a good excuse for college buddies to gather and talk on a regular basis.” Recent shows have drawn attention to Filipino American community events, such as the candlelight vigil held at the PCC in honor of the 65th anniversary of the fall of Bataan; others have explored more humorous topics, such as how many Big Macs each of the podcasters could eat in one sitting.

Not interested in downloading a weekly podcast? It's still possible to catch up with our region's latest Filipino American news and gossip online. Visit “Filipino Tsismis,” one of several community blogs located at HamptonRoads.com. This Filipino American Web site contains links to news stories in The Virginian-Pilot, announcements about upcoming events and ongoing commentary by local bloggers Tonet Mariano, Randy Padilla, Tracie Liguind and JoJo Orenca.

Perhaps Hampton Roads' best-known Filipino American online personality is Virginia Beach native Christine Gambito, a.k.a. “Happy Slip.” Since posting her first video on YouTube in September 2006, Gambito has become one of the online service's most popular video bloggers. Her video “Mixed Nuts” took second place in the comedy category of the inaugural YouTube video awards, and this spring her YouTube channel ranked 11th in all-time subscriptions. Gambito writes, directs and assumes multiple acting roles in her short videos, which are often based on her own experiences. Her comedy sketches spoof the cross-generational mix-ups common to many Filipino American families; the name “Happy Slip” itself is a play on her childhood understanding of her mother's persistent reminder (in accented English) to wear a half slip.

FILIPINO AMERICAN TELEVISION

Despite the burgeoning influence of the Internet, more Americans get their news and information from television than from any other source. According to 36-year-old Jay Sanchez, television is an ideal medium for keeping Filipino Americans informed about community events, and for sharing the richness and diversity of Filipino American culture with a broader public. Sanchez, who was born in the Philippines but grew up in Northern Virginia, is an independent television producer and chief videographer at WHRO. For the past several years, he has been working to make the dream of Filipino American Television a reality. Sanchez has created a half-hour pilot episode for a weekly TV news/entertainment magazine, which he hopes will be picked up by a Hampton Roads station sometime this year. “Fil-Am TV” is to feature video segments of regional cultural events and personalities, cooking presentations, an events calendar and studio-hosted intros and segues. In the meantime, interested viewers can visit his Web site, filamtelevision.com, for a glimpse of past footage of Filipino American events in Hampton Roads.

Conclusions

The Filipino American community has enriched the cultural and economic fabric of Hampton Roads. In the past two generations, the regional Filipino American population has grown to 45,000 residents. Filipino American professionals have assumed valued positions throughout the community, particularly in medical fields. The presence of groups like the Filipino American Cultural Society at Virginia Beach's Salem High School and the Filipino American Student Association (FASA) at Old Dominion University have broadened the learning experiences of our region's students. All residents of Hampton Roads may now sample specialties like pancit and lumpia at local eateries, attend the numerous cultural events sponsored by the region's three Filipino American centers, and even tune in to The Filipino Channel with their digital cable subscriptions.

These accomplishments are noteworthy, given that the foreign-born population of Hampton Roads is smaller than those of many comparable metropolitan regions in the American South. Until 1992, it was possible for citizens of the Philippines to enlist directly in the U.S. Navy, which has been a defining factor in the experience of our region's Filipino Americans.

Many observers comment on the close-knit, even family-like relations that link together members of our region's Filipino American community. The respect for family, tradition and authority that so characterizes the Filipino experience seems particularly pronounced in Hampton Roads. The community's close relations stem in part from the common professional background that many of its members share, as well as from the size and predominantly suburban lifestyle of Hampton Roads itself. Filipino American communities in more populous urban areas can be larger but more diffuse; in cities such as New York and San Diego, Filipino Americans are just one among many influential Asian American and other ethnic groups.

Familial relations come with some disadvantages. The intimacy of the Filipino American community and the vibrancy of its associational life sometimes has isolated it somewhat from others in Hampton Roads. There are surprisingly few prominent Filipino American businesses in our region, and many residents are unaware that a "Little Manila" can be found just off Indian River Road. Moreover, all families have their disagreements and cross-generational misunderstandings, and Hampton Roads' Filipino Americans are no exception. Conflict rather than cooperation has sometimes characterized relations between the many different groupings that comprise this area's Filipino American community. Some of these misunderstandings extend back to the regional and linguistic differences that have long divided the Philippines itself, others relate to personality differences, and still others arise from disagreements about appropriate courses of action.

Generational differences are inevitable in a community where "aunties" and "uncles" (the respectful titles commonly used for Filipino American elders) who emigrated from the Philippines in the 1960s and 1970s coexist with children and grandchildren born in the United States. One of the challenges that Hampton Roads' Filipino American centers and associations now face is a transition in leadership to younger Filipino Americans.

The region's Filipino American community rallied in the aftermath of a highly publicized incident of gang violence in 1991 when two Filipino Americans were wounded by gunfire in a suburban neighborhood of Virginia Beach. The swift and dedicated response of Filipino American families and community leaders helped to squelch most dangerous Filipino American gang activity soon thereafter, according to Virginia Beach Police Deputy Chief Jim Cervera. The Filipino American Community Action Group was founded to address the gang problem in 1991, and it remains engaged in a variety of civic issues today.

The event which many agree brings out the best in Hampton Roads' Filipino American community is the annual Filipino American Friendship Day Picnic, held each Fourth of July weekend at Virginia Beach's Red Wing Park. The event celebrates both American and Philippine political independence (the Republic of the Philippines was established on July 4, 1946), as well as the ties between both peoples. Attendance in recent years has grown to 8,000, according to picnic chairman Joe Ortega. In 2006, 35 different Filipino American organizations were represented, making it the most inclusive regional gathering of its kind. With the sponsorship of prominent corporations in our region, there is free admission, food and entertainment for all, and many non-Filipinos choose to attend, most especially those who hold or aspire to public office.