Empowering Seminar Series for Fil-Am Youth Concludes in High Note at Rowan University

NEW YORK, 27 October 2015 - As celebrations for the Filipino-American History Month continued, the Philippine Consulate General New York held the fourth and final leg of the Leadership and Mentoring Seminar: Empowerment for the Emerging Generation series for an energetic and accomplished group of young attendees at Rowan University Glasboro, New Jersey last 24 October.

Co-organized by the Rowan University Philippine-American Coalition (RUPAC), the Office of the President of Rowan University, and Board of Trustees Member Lita Abele, the event attracted more than 60 Fil-Ams youths consisting of students, young professionals and organization leaders.

Dr Ali Houshman, Rowan University President welcomed guests to the Rowan Hall Auditorium, expressing his pleasure at the Filipino-American youth’s interest in learning about their heritage and acquiring skills that will help them succeed later in life.
Consul General Mario De Leon gave the keynote address, and explained how the LMS for the second gens came about. He mentioned the series of Leadership and Management Seminar for first-generation Filipino community leaders that was held in 2013 to professionalize the Filcom organizations and inspire the elders to re-think and repurpose their groups. One resounding outcome of that program was a resolution to transition leadership to the emerging generation of Filipino-Americans. ConGen reiterated the Consulate’s mission to encourage the youth to take on leadership positions in the community and ultimately, the mainstream American society. He highlighted trailblazing Filipinos in the US public and government service, and urged the young ones in the audience to be the best representation of Filipino-Americans in the “real world.”

Historical background and context was provided by published author, poet and university professor Patrick Rosal during the first module “Understanding the Filipino.” Professor Rosal related his own personal family struggles and how he turned to his passion – poetry and literature – in expressing his identity, feelings, views, and sentiments articulately. The Rutgers English professor also encouraged the young attendees to be more involved in the world around them and use art and their creative side to find an intellectual way to grasp strangers. He highlighted celebrated Filipino artists and writers who are “revealing to America and the world the stories that they have forgotten” especially in the Philippine-US shared history.

Associate State Director for AARP Pennsylvania Ms Grace Rustia steered the conversation during the module “Leadership and Motivation.” Drawing from her personal experiences as a broadcaster during the 9/11 attack and volunteer work with the community, she imparted her message to the youth the value of servant leadership. Ms Rustia shared advice on motivating herself on being a leader: be bold in going after your goals; seize every good opportunity to change lives; Soar high and dream big; and recognize yourself as a leader of service to others.
Pennsylvania Governor’s Advisory Commission on Asian American Affairs Appointee Brad Baldia stressed the importance on building a network and making impactful relationships in the module “Managing a Mentoring Program.” Himself a beneficiary of effective mentors and eventually passing career knowledge and experience to younger colleagues and friends, Brad encouraged the attendees to tap into the more seasoned professionals, experts and community leaders for mentoring on personal, political and career advice.

(L) A youth community member thanks the speakers for inspiring her in pursuing her dreams in government service; (R) A RUPAC member remarks, “A leader is someone who influences people.”

Ms Agnes Jamora, CEO of 13 Degrees North (an events and marketing company) shared her expertise in Project Management in the module “Events Management.” She illustrated how she, as an events organizer and interior designer by profession uses Project Management and design principles in planning successful events. In her interactive presentation, she advised the future leaders to not be shy in promoting their events, be willing to reciprocate what they ask of their sponsors and peers, and to always present the best face in every stage they appear.

(L-R): -bot CEO RJ Lualhati, Superbands Founder Jessica Villa, RUPAC President Maria Torcules, MODiFYD President Winchelle Delfin describe how their involvement in the community has enriched their professional and personal growth.

Two panels in the afternoon discussed issues and opportunities that second-gens are faced with in the community, and ways they could look back and give back.
Maria Torcalas, President of RUPAC related her experience in UP Diliman as an exchange student and her takeaways in her summer spent in the Philippine State University. She acknowledges her participation in the community as a support system and a connection to her heritage.

RJ Lualhati, La Salle University and CEO of –bot, a technology startup that builds prosthetics, described his joy in using his company in giving back to the Philippines through his inexpensive prosthetic body parts that changes lives of disabled patients in low-income provinces in the Philippines.

Jessica Villa, founder of Superbands, an online community which aims to empower and encourage depressed, bullied and struggling youth through music to break barriers and build connections with peers and find confidence among their co-music fans.

Winchelle Delfin, a youth member of Philippine Community of South New Jersey illustrated how she and her peers use dance as a medium to promote the Filipino culture and enhance their bond to the motherland. She recognized that the youth members are the future leaders of the community and are responsible for expanding the base of the community to connect with the non-Filipinos and reach out to the mainstream society.

Kaya Collaborative CEO Rexy Josh Dorado spoke about fellowship opportunities for the Fil-Am youth to understand life in the Philippines better. He encouraged the attendees to take advantage of immersion programs available for them and enrich their appreciation for the Philippine heritage.

Councilman Jonathan Wong, the youngest Filipino in elected government, gave a political and civic leadership view of being a second-gen member. He described his work for the community and urged aspirants to pursue politics to enact tangible and impactful changes in the society.
Filipino Executive Council of Greater Philadelphia Ferdie Luyun shared his experiences as a volunteer of Gawad Kalinga through their medical missions to the Philippines. Mr. Luyun invited the young ones in the room to look into social entrepreneurship to help improve living conditions and raise dignity of our less privileged kababayans.

The Leadership and Mentoring Seminar: Empowerment for the Emerging Generation is an initiative of the Consulate which was launched in New York last September 2014. The previous sessions were held in Boston College last April 2015, and earlier this month in Yale University. END