AFICS PHILIPPINES

NEWSLETTER

Association of Former International Civil Servants - Philippines

DECEMBER 2022



President's Message

AFICS Philippines has had an intensely active year in 2022. With a redefined organizational structure, our 7 operational committees have certainly gone on full gear.

The Membership Committee reviewed our recruitment processes and, on the way, improved the AFICS membership database. Our Pension and Benefits Committee continues to directly assist retirees, helping members activate their pension status under the threat of suspension. The AFICS Philippines' Retirement Handbook has been recently revised, with substantial additions and a "new look" format. The Communication Committee has super-charged its product line and just launched a series of information profiles with real life UN models of "Healthy Ageing". Outreach closes the year with a highly successful auction on-line bazaar that is expected to benefit about 100-150 elders in 2 or 3 charity-assisted retirement homes in Metro Manila.

AFICS Philippines fielded a strong delegation to the FAFICS General Assembly Meeting in July this year. Vice President for Communication Delia Barcelona was elected as one of five VPs of the FAFICS Bureau and and our Vice President - Pension and Benefits, Marlene Arduo was appointed as Alternative Representative to the UN Joint Staff Pension Fund. Participation has opened new opportunities for closer relations with other FAFICS member associations.

And the marching beat continues. AFICS Philippines and the WHO Association of Former Staff Members (AFSM) have signed a Joint Declaration of Commitment to support the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing promising closer cooperation in the coming years. We look forward to a new AFIC Philippines Rules of Procedure (ROP) 2022, that complements our By-Laws. The ROP will reaffirm our vision and mission statements and detail our processes for elections of officers, budget and finance, and collective decision-making.

We move to the New Year with hope and optimism and, hopefully a healthier financial bottom-line for our organization. Happy Holidays and see you all in our General Assembly in January 2023!

Alcestis A. Mangahas
AFICS Phil President 2022-2023



AUCTION BAZAAR BOOSTS FUNDS FOR OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

by Jana Ricasio

Early in November, the Outreach Committee launched an on-line auction bazaar, dubbed, *Treasures from Our Journey.* A total of 76 items were donated by members for auction with proceeds going directly to the Association's outreach beneficiaries targeting neglected or abandoned elderly.



Unlike previous auctions resembling an actual "flea market", this year's auction had to be done online due to the residual pandemic. The digital catalog, prepared for this purpose, was widely disseminated through Facebook and chat groups. The range of items included household items, fashion accessories, decorative items, and more. The initiative was a perfect activity before Christmas as buyers were able to find things as gifts for the season and for other occasions, like birthdays, anniversaries, housewarming, weddings.

When the auction closed on Nov 15, 36 items were sold (about half of the lot) with an approximate net proceeds of about PhP 51,000. Cash donations of around P21,000 were also received for the outreach. Thanks everyone for your support, especially to our hardworking committee members Anna Liboro-Senga, Danilo Carlos, Rencee Tayzon, Linda Milan, and Socorro Reyes. Thanks also for the great support from the Executive Committee and AFICS friends.

It's Christmas time

Let's get together again.....

December 14, 2022, Time: 11:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Newgrange Condotel, 32 Timog Avenue, QC
Motif: Christmas colors; Bring your Christmas-y hat!



THE 5TH EDITION OF THE AFICS PHILS' UN RETIREMENT HANDBOOK IS OUT!

(Now you can buy a copy…)

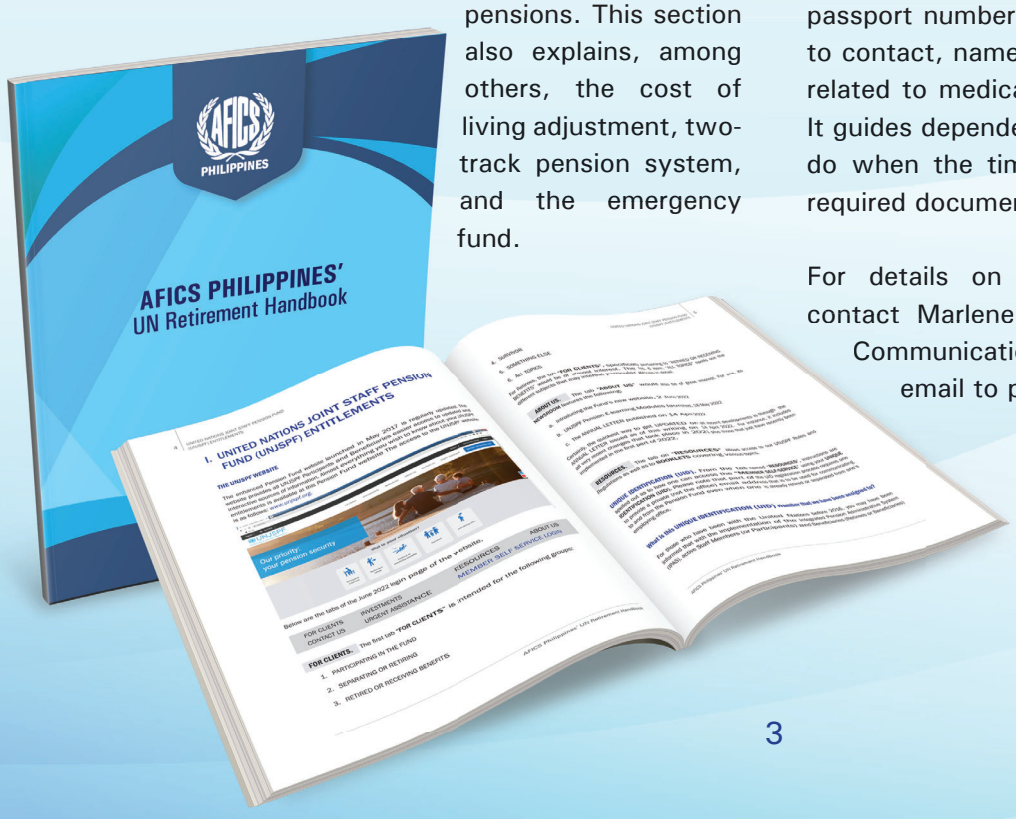
by Lois Villanueva

Are you about to retire and need to know what benefits are due you after retirement? Or are you already retired but still ill-equipped to fully enjoy the benefits you are entitled to?

No worries, the Fifth Edition of the AFICS Philippines' UN Retirement Handbook is out! This valuable resource handbook has been consolidated over the years by Ma. Magdalena Arduo, AFICS Phil Vice-President for Pension and Benefits.

The Handbook serves as a guide on practically every aspect of retirement and can be helpful to all retirees or those in the planning stage of their UN retirement. It is also a helpful reference for families of UN staff retirees when it comes to helping them with the continuity of the pension and benefits when the retiree passes away.

The Handbook has four sections. The **first section** starts with familiarizing retirees and beneficiaries about the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (UNJSPF) website. In this section, retirees are advised on the importance of the *Certificate of Entitlement* in order not to disrupt the payment of pensions. This section also explains, among others, the cost of living adjustment, two-track pension system, and the emergency fund.



The **second section** deals with the After Service Health Insurance (ASHI) and discusses who are eligible to enroll in ASHI after retirement, how to apply for this health insurance, how much one should contribute to the ASHI, and how to report changes in ASHI coverage. This section presents the various medical insurance plans and describes in detail the premiums, hospitals that are participants of the insurance plans, and others.

The **third section** focuses on the After Service Life Insurance (ASLI) which points out that AETNA UN Group Life After Service Insurance is voluntary and the qualified staff solely pays for their insurance premiums. It states that if the staff had enrolled in this UN Group Life Insurance while in active service and paid the premiums for at least ten years, then the retiree is entitled to the AETNA FREE ASLI Coverage. This section refers the retirees to the website to get more detailed information on insurance details.

The **fourth section** provides pointers on preparing for the eventuality of a retiree passing away. These include keeping a logbook of the retiree's passport number, driver's license, name of priest to contact, names of spouse and children, details related to medical history, list of properties, etc. It guides dependents and beneficiaries on what to do when the time comes on the submission of required documents.

For details on how to buy a copy, please contact Marlene Arduo or any member of the Communication Committee. You can also email to philippinesafics@gmail.com.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE AFICS PHILS' TRIPLE ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

by Lois Villanueva

The Association of Former International Civil Servants (AFICS Philippines) held a luncheon gathering last July 30, 2022 to mark triple anniversary celebrations, namely, it's 14th year founding anniversary, 13th anniversary of its membership with FAFICS, and first anniversary of its being officially registered with the Philippine's Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). It was a hybrid celebration with around 25 members in a face-to-face mode and 30 members through virtual attendance via Zoom.



Last July 30, 2022, AFICS Phil celebrated several of its milestones.

A well-laid out programme steered the celebration that included a walk down memory lane through a PowerPoint presentation on the birth and development of AFICS. This was followed by the awarding of certificates of recognition to six long-time members, namely Magdalena Arduo, Lydia Ontal, Mary Racelis, Edmundo Ortega, Ralph Diaz, and Ces Adorna, for their valuable contribution and outstanding service.

The Committee on Communication headed by Delia Barcelona also made a presentation on the latest communication committee outputs especially produced for this event, namely, the Anniversary Newsletter, the AFICS flier, the finishing touches on the UN Retirement Handbook, and the updated membership form.

Finally, Immediate Past President Ed Ortega led the formal induction of the new set of officers. Thetis Mangahas announced that Delia Barcelona was elected as one of the Federation of Association of Former International Civil Servants (FAFICS) Vice Presidents, and Marlene Arduo was appointed as Alternate Representative to the Pension Board during the FAFICS 52nd Council Meeting held on July 17-21,2022.

The celebration, held at Maria Diaz's Newgrange Condotel, was truly memorable and momentous, thanks to the organizers (Reggie, Tony, Danny B. and Mi Ann) who made sure that everyone enjoyed their time celebrating together!



Past President Ed Ortega led the formal oath taking of the new set of AFICS Phil officers.



Ed was one of the six recipients of AFICS Phil's certificates of recognition.



SPECIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

The November 5, 2022 special virtual ExCom meeting was called by the President to discuss a few time-urgent matters. Among these was the collaboration between AFICS Phil and the WHO-AFSM on the Healthy Ageing. The status of the UN Retirement Handbook and ways to promote and market it was also discussed. There were also updates on the Telekwentuhan series and plans for a Christmas get-together. After some discussion around the AFICS Phil Facebook page and how it can help boost the planned auction and other membership-related activities, the ExCom decided to support the Communication Committee's proposal to test, for a year, its FB page changing its setting from private to public.

RULES OF PROCEDURE IN THE WORKS

A special committee has been created to develop the Rules of Procedures AFICS Phil-, based on its current Statutes and By-laws. The Committee is chaired by Ruth Batten and includes Thetis Mangahas, Tony Fernandez, and Delia Barcelona as members. The review will take into account provisions that may either be inadequate, missing, or duplicative. The Committee plans to complete this work and present the draft to the ExCom within December for review and endorsement. Eventually, the plan is to have it ratified during the January 2023 General Assembly.

SUPPORT TO AJ KALINGA FOUNDATION AND FEAST FOR A CAUSE



This year in August, AFICS Phil turned over Pesos 45,000 to the Arnold Janssen Kalinga Foundation, Inc. (AJKF) to support its Urban Gardening and Alternative Learning System.

Several AFICS Philippines members also supported a fund-raising dinner organized by the Foundation to benefit the urban poor and the homeless of Manila. The event, at the *Pardon My French* restaurant in Makati on 28 November 2022, delivered on its promise to delectable French cuisine and enjoyable retro music. The AJKF has been among AFICS Phil's outreach beneficiaries for the past four years. AJKF's mission is to recreate and empower the lives of the homeless and the wounded. Its efforts benefit hundreds of homeless, orphans, and out-of-school youth (young and adult) of Metro Manila.

The Foundation provides for its beneficiaries' immediate needs for nutrition, personal hygiene, and health as well as their long-term needs for literacy, moral and spiritual education, and socio-economic opportunities for making a living. It also has an urban gardening program which helps the community learn about "connective processing" and how to nurture small plants into edible food.



AFICS members got to pose with Fr. Flavie during the enjoyable fund-raising night.

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Members of the Outreach Committee, led by its Chair, VP Jana Ricasio, together with Danny Carlos, Anna Senga and Rencee Tayzon, visited homes for the elderly to get first-hand information on the care for the older people. One was the *Anawin* home for the elderly under the *Light of Jesus Foundation.* Highlights of the visit included chats with the social worker and the elderly residents. The team donated cookies, milk, and boxes of ready-to-cook champorado and arrozcaldo.

The Outreach Committee members also visited *Bahay Kanlungan* home for the elderly in Antipolo managed by the Camillian Sisters. AFICS Phil plans to support homes for older people.



The Outreach Committee members were graciously welcomed by a Camillian Sister during their visit to Bahay Kanlungan.



Danny and Anna pose at one of the signages of Bahay Kanlungan.



Bahay Kanlungan is in Antipolo. Left to right is Danny, Jana, and Anna of the AFICS Phil Outreach committee.

"CHANGING OF THE GUARDS" FOR THE *TELEKWENTUHAN* SERIES





Recently, indefatigable chair of the *Telekwentuhan* Working Group Mary Racelis requested to pass on the chairing responsibility due to her teaching and other competing commitments. Without much ado, President Emeritus Cecilio Adorna took on the challenge. Under Mary's leadership, AFICS Phils managed to organize four *Telekwentuhan* events on entrepreneurship, COVID-19, voters' education and empowerment prior to the national 2022 presidential elections. The Association is confident that this transition will not only be smooth but will continue to be dynamic. Thanks to Mary and Ces as well as the Committee members consisting of Thetis Mangahas, Delia Barcelona, Ruth Batten, and Soc Reyes.

BESSIE GARCIA-AGUIRRE: DRAWN TO AFICS

by Tony L. Fernandez

The drive to recruit more spouses or surviving spouses of UN retirees as associate members of AFICS Philippines is actively on-going. This move was spearheaded by Membership Committee chair Danilo Bautista.

The experience of Isabel "Bessie" Garcia Aguirre as a surviving spouse of a UN retiree illustrates how AFICS Phil membership is truly of help.

The image of how Bessie was when I started to join AFICS Phil's open meetings ten years ago, remains vivid in my mind. As an associate member of AFICS Phil, she was supportive and was actively engaged in meetings and events of the association. Her presence always brought an added touch of elegance. Although we have kept in touch during the COVID-19 restrictions, it was such a joy to meet Bessie again in person brought about by our AFICS Phil July 2022 anniversary gathering. True to her daughter's description as "the eternally young mom," Bessie seemed as young as when I first met her years before.



Bessie (with pink blouse) joined the toast during AFICS Phil's July anniversary celebration.

She took up foreign service at the University of the Philippines (UP) and enjoyed the co-ed campus life after having spent most of her younger days of schooling at the University of Santo Thomas and an exclusive girls' school.



Bessie and Bayani enjoyed visiting several historical sites together.

At UP, she met Bani who majored in business administration and wrote for campus publications. This fortuitous meeting led to a life together. When Bani left his work at the National Economic Development Authority and took an offer at UNESCAP in Bangkok, Bessie, son Magat and daughter Majal, went with him. Since then, Bessie was where Bani was as he worked with various UN agencies in many places including Geneva, Delhi, and New York. His last posting was in Sudan where he was the UN Country Director in 1998. In these postings, Bessie became "a cultural ambassador" of the Philippines.

Bessie's memorable experiences are many. While in Geneva, she and other Filipinos organized cultural events featuring Philippine dances and songs. At later postings, she did similar events which underlined her drive and organizational skills. When I interviewed her on the phone for this article, she excitedly narrated another experience showcasing Philippine culture in a fundraising event, which was graced by the presence of the queen of Lesotho. The queen was so happy with the additional funds to support her charitable projects.

Bessie shared that when Bani was alive, she was not aware of matters related to UN retirement such as what to do in case of hospitalization. It was not a surprise that she did not have information on how to access the pension benefits as a UN retiree's surviving spouse. Despite attempts with the local UN office for assistance and the help of Virginia "Jean" Almario (an active AFICS Phil lifetime member who has since passed on), she ran into much difficulty. Bessie finally decided to go to UNHQ in New York, where Majal is a practicing

lawyer. She went to UNDP, UNJSPF, and other offices armed with referrals from AFICS Philippines. Eventually, the benefits due her were resolved.

Right after the long process to claim the retirement benefits accruing to a dependent, Bessie became a regular in the open meetings of AFICS Phil, then under the leadership of the late Ralph Diaz.

Bessie thinks that widows and widowers of retired UN staff may encounter the situation she went through. She thinks becoming an associate member of AFICS Phil was an opportunity for her to be better informed about post-retirement. The camaraderie among members of AFICS Phil also brought her new friends and renewed acquaintances.

AFICS Phil is encouraging members to bring in their respective spouses as associate members. The advantages are many, including easier access to possibly challenging procedures and references as well as being with warm bodies that make the journey to retirement much easier.

Communication (and Newsletter) Committee

Chair and Editor-in-Chief:
Delia R. Barcelona

Associate Editor-in-Chief:
Mary Ann Q. Maglipon

Co-Chair and Managing Editor:
Marylina C. Mabida

Creative Editor:
Antonio I. Fernandez

News Editor:
Carmelita L. Villanueva

Features Editor:
Teresa H. Stuart Guida

A poem shared by Marylina Mabida – with inspiring reflections about our lives as retirees.

The Dash Poem

By Linda Ellis

I read of a man who stood to speak
At the funeral of a friend
He referred to the dates on the tombstone
From the beginning...to the end

He noted that first came the date of birth
And spoke the following date with tears,
But he said what mattered most of all
Was the dash between those years

For that dash represents all the time
That they spent alive on earth.
And now only those who loved them
Know what that little line is worth

For it matters not, how much we own,
The cars...the house...the cash.
What matters is how we live and love
And how we spend our dash.

So, think about this long and hard.
Are there things you'd like to change?
For you never know how much time is left
That can still be rearranged.

If we could just slow down enough
To consider what's true and real
And always try to understand
The way other people feel.

And be less quick to anger
And show appreciation more
And love the people in our lives
Like we've never loved before.

If we treat each other with respect
And more often wear a smile,
Remembering this special dash
Might only last a little while

So, when your eulogy is being read
With your life's actions to rehash...
Would you be proud of the things they say
About how you spent YOUR dash?

PROMOTING THE UN DECADE OF HEALTHY AGEING

by Tess Stuart Guida



November 30, 2022. AFICS Phil President Thetis Mangahas (right) and Linda Milan, President of AFSM-WHO/ex officio AFICS ExCom member, signed an agreement to support the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing.

AFICS Philippines and the Association of Former Staff Members (AFSM) of WHO Manila are joining forces to help achieve the targets of the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing, 2021 – 2030.

The Decade emphasizes the central role of older persons, including UN retirees, as exemplars of healthy ageing and as enablers in lending their voice to promote healthy ageing. The objective is to improve the lives of older people, their families, and the communities where they live.

On October 16, 2022, in a joint declaration of commitment and support to the Decade, AFICS Phil President Thetis Mangahas and ASFM WHO President Linda Milan agreed to collaborate on the following initiatives:

- Promote positive images of seniors and older persons highlighting their engagement and contributions to their communities and in members' social media.For example, beginning October 1, through the AFICS Phil Facebook page, the Communication Committee started a series tentatively labeled *"Lola and Lolo Aktibista"* that features examples of healthy and smart ageing among Filipino UN retirees. The healthy and active lifestyles of AFICS Phil's officers that were initially featured in our Facebook page were Mi Ann, Marylina, Linda, Danny B, Danny C., and Soc;

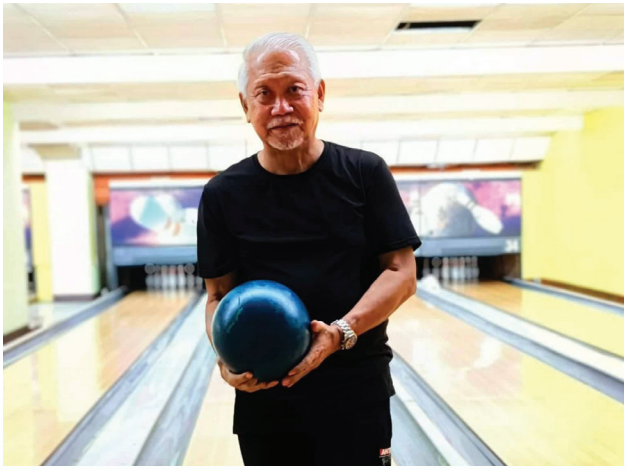
- Provide opportunities for UN retirees to share their knowledge and expertise by directly supporting selected institutions that serve older persons and other outreach efforts. For example, Jana Ricasio leads the Outreach Committee in raising funds to provide resources for communities and homes of older people and the *Kalinga Foundation;*



The first to be featured at AFICS Phil's Facebook page was Linda Milan who stays fit with her regular walk around her community.



AFICS Phil's Facebook page featured Danny Bautista who eagerly plays golf with his friends on a regular basis to keep healthy.



Danny Carlos, also featured in Facebook, is a tennis and bowling enthusiast.

- Participate and engage in initiatives to address older persons' lack of knowledge in self-protection in areas such as banking and financial vulnerability, mental and physical health resilience, among others. For example, the Development Committee led by Socorro Reyes plans to organize forums relevant to healthy ageing around the economy, health care, nutrition, education, social protection, justice and human rights;

- Join stakeholders across disciplines and sectors to share learning and knowledge, undertake research probes, and leverage resources to pursue and sustain action;

- Coordinate with other stakeholders and contribute to advocacy efforts with national and local government agencies and institutions in both the executive and legislative branches, as well as among UN agencies, on enabling measures that ensure age-friendly environments, access to good quality essential health services, and access to good quality long term care to enable longevity with dignity and comfort.

The AFICS Phil Communication Committee invites members to share your experiences and ideas that promote the above initiatives. And if you are willing to be featured in the *lola at lolo aktibista* FB series, please submit your dynamic action photos with a short description (20-30 words) about your photos to any member of the Communication Committee.



Marylina Mabida keeps herself happy with her gardening and taking care of her companion pet.



Mi Ann Maglipon's Facebook feature was on her regular trekking around Antipolo hills.



AFICS-PHL showed Soc Reyes' passionate advocacy for justice and her keeping healthy through walking and yoga.

REVENGE TRAVEL?
OR SIMPLY ENJOYING TRAVEL

by Tony L. Fernandez

I only came to know the expression "revenge travel" as I was enjoying a recent vacation overseas. Understandably, there is a tone of wild abandon in the term.

People living in the Philippines, having had among the strictest community quarantine, are no exception to the itch to leave home and travel with a vengeance. Whether you like the expression or not, people all over the world feel a new kind of freedom after restrictions have been relaxed.

Indeed, in countries where I visited recently like the UK and Ireland, people who wore masks were the exception. Going out without wearing a mask, in itself, was liberating. Only the Manila/Singapore (and vice versa) leg of the plane journey required passengers to wear K-95 masks. Thankfully, the one-way flight lasted only about four hours.

Travel is being in a different world, not necessarily escapism, but being a different self, I believe, perhaps a younger self. For retirees, it is about enjoying places and experiences with one's hard-earned money. It's about feeling what one deserves.

My 19-Day Trip

I went on a 19-day trip which included a ten-day cruise, a self-made tour of London, and a road trip in Ireland.

In retrospect, for most of us UN retirees, mission travel was part of the job. Short missions, seldom lend time for sightseeing, with work-life spent between hotel and offices. For this revenge travel, I got this feeling of being enriched, as a tourist visiting historical sites in London like the Tower of London with my wife Nanette, her seven sisters, and her three brothers-in-law. And what about the landmarks one sees in the news on TV or youtube like the familiar Big Ben, the Prime Minister's 10 Downing Street residence, or Westminster Abbey



Tony Fernandez enjoyed 19 days of travelling with his wife in Europe.

which figured in the reports and live broadcasts on the demise of Queen Elizabeth II last September. Some places are seemingly inexhaustible in richness; going back to the British Museum is something like this.

With cellphones these days, quick arrangements to meet up or changes in the itinerary could be conveniently made. To enable me to communicate cheaply, I bought a local SIM and placed it on my other cellphone which I no longer use. A pub lunch made us feel like a local even more. The hospitality of the Battens even made us feel closer to London, with John and I having ale, and Ruth gamefully making her shandy by putting a few drops of beer in the 7-Up.

Having made a trip to Stonehenge on my own from Reading three years before, I confidently offered to be the tour guide of our group of eight from Southampton (we were to be joined by three more of Nanette's sisters who live and work abroad). I was happy that they enjoyed the one-day trip which included their first train and bus rides in Britain, a visit to the majestic Salisbury Cathedral, and lunch at The Refectory, so ingeniously linked to the cathedral's side with a transparent fiberglass

roof through which the cathedral's spire and roof could be seen. For the second time, I had a look at one of the five existing hand-written manuscripts of the Magna Carta.

The main part of the trip was the 10-day cruise to Belgium, France, and Spain making stops along the north Atlantic coast of western Europe. This modern-day cruise was a marvel by itself, with almost 4,000 people in it and the intense concentration of food moving between ports of call. Our trip went smoothly except for one stormy weather. There might have been 'temporary' disappointments, but these were negligible as I recall the many wonderful scenery and World Heritage sites we saw, the happy company in our group of 11, conversations with cruisemates, and superb entertainment aboard the Norwegian Star.

The character of ports varies from the huge passenger port terminal of Bruges, Belgium to the small and modest Gijon, Spain. Commonly observed in the ports is the orderliness and tidiness of the spaces - something to envy for an archipelagic country like ours. In La Coruna, Spain, the port melds seamlessly to the streets by the waterfront and those leading to the Old Quarter. Actually, we were booked for a Baltic cruise earlier, but it had to be canceled due to the war in Ukraine. The cruise company quickly emailed us and gave the enticing European offer.

Aboard the ship, conversing with a Filipino staff was part of the daily routine. Almost 70% of the crew were Filipinos, including the master chef and a head doctor. In my group, there was hankering for white rice. There was a Japanese restaurant, Ginza, for that. At a stop in Spain, *lechon* came on board, and so we feasted on it in the buffet. As some of you would have yourselves experienced, there was just an abundance of food 24/7. Personally, I was happy with the wide selection of fresh vegetables and fruits. I wondered how they managed the logistics of all these.

One never ceases to learn, and travel is a great way to learn. As a friend wisely said years ago, the travel experience can never be stolen; it remains with you as long as you live. To keep memories alive, one hobby I grew into this time of pandemic was to create photobooks. As photography has gone digital, don't you wish for the days when you could browse through photo albums? Well, photobooks make up for this. With tons of digital photos, it can be a challenge selecting what to put in the photobook. It can also be addicting when one is driven to complete it soonest.



Tony with Ruth Batten and her husband in London.



Enjoying sunny Bruges, Belgium.



The Tower Bridge of London was the backdrop of this photo of Tony and wife Nanette.

Revenge elsewhere

Where did some AFICS Phil members go?

LOIS VILLANUEVA. Lois Villanueva enjoyed her four days, right here in the Philippines, at Amanpulo - a destination for the rich and famous, like Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, Madonna, Robert de Niro, Britney Spears, Tom Cruise, Mariah Carey and Beyonce. It was a celebrity-like experience being pampered by the most attentive, well-trained, caring staff whose excellent service is second to none. It is a back-to-nature experience, with the whitest, powdery sand beaches, and pristine reefs.



Like the celebrities who have gone ahead of her to this place, Lois enjoyed the amenities of Amanpulo.

THETIS MANGAHAS and MI ANN MAGLIPON. President Thetis and Corporate Secretary Mi Ann with a group of long time friends from the UP Student Catholic Action (UPSCA) went on a domestic adventure to Coron, Palawan. In their version of revenge travel, the ten intrepid seniors took to brave the waters, lakes and coves of the Calamianes island group at the heels of Typhoon Karding last Sept 25.



Mi Ann and Thetis joined UPSCA friends in a 7-day trip around Palawan enjoying the bonding despite the sometimes cloudy weather.

The trip was planned two years ago but was disrupted by COVID 19. Aside from remembering dear friends who have passed on, there were new beginnings.

Mi Ann and husband Boboy had established a family home in the island of Tambon and hosted the group. Boboy, who had taken up birdwatching, and the excited friends were rewarded in this trip by the sighting of a hoopoe bird, only the third sighting in all the Calamianes.

Thetis started on her own journey of going back to her roots in Concepcion and engaging the community in basket weaving, agriculture, and hopefully eco-tourism.



Seniors feeling wonderful !

The hoopoe bird is the sign of hope and renewed strength, of this bunch, bound together by 50 years of friendship and now even stronger with the memories of their Palawan journey.

TESS STUART GUIDA and DELIA BARCELONA. The pictures of this mountain with four US presidents carved in granite - Mount Rushmore – are seen almost everywhere.

Well, last June, Delia and Tess (with her husband Sal) did an "exciting trip" there, the Crazy Horse Memorial and the Presidential Museum. They are all in the mountain state of South Dakota, home to the Sioux and Lakota native American tribes. What is the feeling to be at these places which one only reads about only in a book or have seen in photos! Nothing compares to seeing the real thing, allowing one to immerse oneself in the surroundings, the sight and sounds.



(Left to right) Tess, Sal, and Delia posing below the 60-feet high presidents' granite faces of Mt. Rushmore.



Enjoying being "cowboys".



Lydia (wearing maroon jacket) said she might have been the oldest in the trip but she felt enthused as this was her personal spiritual journey.

LYDIA ONTAL. Another recent traveller among us is Lydia Ontal, AFICS VP for International Relations. As part of her bucket list, she travelled to Jordan, the Holy Land, and Istanbul, on what she described as a spiritual journey.

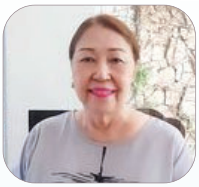
Anyone who has been to that part of the world knows the historic treasures that these place hold, among them the 800 BC caves, Capernaum where Jesus spent his last three years, Mt. Nebo (300 BC) where the exodus ended and where Moses died, among so many. Now that this pilgrimage is over, Lydia feels tired, but more than ever recharged by the confirmation of her faith. The highlight of it for her was the moment she touched the tomb of Jesus. Nevermind, if she was 15 years older than most of the pilgrims in her group.

Whether you plan to splurge or not, the essential part of travelling is being refreshed. An important thing is pacing yourself, so you don't end up too tired. Like Lois, Tess, Delia, Mi Ann, and Thetis, you will find something to your taste and liking out there - history, culture, nature, entertainment. Revenge or not, travel is a gift when one can. So, where to next?

AFICS Philippines Executive Committee 2022-2023



President
Alcestis Mangahas, ILO
- Former Deputy Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific
- Technical expertise on migration, forced and child labor, and human trafficking



Executive Vice President
Regina Molera, UNICEF
- Former Asst Rep, Turkmenistan
- Early childhood care and devt, governance for children



Corporate Secretary
Mary Ann Q. Maglipon, UNICEF
- Former Chief, Communication, Timor Leste
- Loves writing and editing, mountain climbing



Treasurer
Antonio Fernandez, UNCRD
- Former Training Officer
- Climate-smart technologies (including organic farming); enjoys classical piano



Vice President, Budget and Finance
Danny Carlos, UN-ICTR
- Former Chief Budget Officer
- Audit and financial management



Vice President, Communication
Delia Rarela-Barcelona, UNFPA
- Former Chief of Staff, Executive Office, UNFPA HQ; Deputy Regional Director for Arab States
- Communication, Facilitation, Teambuilding, Organizing



Vice President, Development
Socorro Reyes, UN Women (formerly UNIFEM)
- Former Chief, Asia-Pacific and Arab States Section
- Women's rights advocate; Convenor, Free Leila Campaign



Vice President, International Relations
Lydia Ontal, UNHQ
- Former Staff, DPI and Assistant to the FAFICS President
- Now FAFICS Emerita; enjoys golf and piano



Vice President, Membership
Danilo Bautista, UNHCR

- Former Deputy Representative, Indonesia
- Decades of work with and for refugees; enjoys golf



Vice President, Outreach
Jana Ricasio, UN DESA

- Former Chief, Prog Devt Cluster, Capacity Devt Office
- Prog/Proj devt and management, evaluation, strategic planning, policy analysis



Vice President, Pension and Benefits
Ma. Magdalena Arduo, UNICEF

- Former Chief of Operations, China; Operations Officer, Philippines
- Dedicates time to helping fellow retirees on their pension and insurance benefits



Chair, Committee on Rules and Procedures
Ruth Batten, UNEP

- Former Chief, Administration and Communications, Ozone Secretariat
- Keen on adult literacy and charity work



Co-chair, Communication
Marylina Mabida, DPKO

- Former Field Services Officer, Communications and Logistics
- Photography



Co-chair, Pension and benefits
Ludivina Santos, UNDP

- Former Human Resource Associate, UNDP Manila
- Passionate about training, coordination, and being of service to others



Ex-Officio
Linda Milan, WHO (AFSM-Manila)

- Former Director for Reform, Office of the Regional Director, WHO Western Pacific Region
- Advocate of good governance in health and climate-smart hospitals; also passionate about homemaking

AFICS PHILIPPINES ADVISERS

Cecilio Adorna, President Emeritus 2016-2017 (UNICEF)
Maria Diaz, Former Executive Committee Secretary 2019-2021 (UNICEF)
Edmundo Ortega, President Emeritus 2018-2021 (UNEP/UNON)
Mary Racelis, (UNICEF)

We encourage all members or their family members to contribute articles to the AFICS Phils newsletter. Contact us at philippinesafics@gmail.com !