



**Northern Marianas
Humanities Council**

Navigating the Human Experience

**Wednesday
October 12, 2022
11:30AM**

**Pacific Islands Club
Charley's Cabaret**

2022

**Governor's Humanities
Awards**

PROGRAM

Opening Chant

Welcoming Remarks

Dr. Bobby James A. Cruz

Chair, Northern Marianas Humanities Council

Special Remarks

Governor Ralph DLG Torres

Presentation of Awards

Michael A. White

Chair, Nomination and Bylaws Committee

Presentation of Service Awards

Gretchen A. Smith

Vice Chair, Northern Marianas Humanities Council

Closing Remarks

Leo Pangelinan

Executive Director, Northern Marianas Humanities Council



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2022

Governor's Humanities Award

RECIPIENTS



FRANCES MANIBUSAN SABLAN

Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities

Frances Sablan was born & raised on Guam by her Chamorro mother and maternal grandparents. She grew up with a good understanding of Chamorro, but realized through interviewing elders on Guam between 1976 & 1978 as a Teacher Corps Intern that speaking, reading & writing Chamorro was a challenge. When Sablan moved to Saipan in 1978, she immediately set out to improve her Chamorro reading comprehension using the Novena books as a 'techa', especially 'I Nobenan Niño'.

Her Finu' Chamorro was put to the test when in 1995 she was invited as a guest speaker on Progrãman I Taotao-ta Talk Show featured on Marianas Cable Vision. She later co-hosted the program along with former Mayor Juan Tudela and founders, Jess & Anicia Sonoda. She became the program's sole host up until 1999 when she invited John Oliver Gonzales to co-host the show during its last year.

In 1998, Sablan enrolled in her first Chamorro language class at NMC as a student of Siñora Carmen Taimaño. It was in this class that she learned to write Chamorro using the Chamorro orthography adopted at the time. When Siñot John Del Rosario took a break from writing his Chamorro language column in the Saipan Tribune, she stepped in to continue his work by writing a newspaper column about various topics in Chamorro.

Sablan joined the Chamorro Dictionary Revision Group when the core group was comprised of Dr. Rita Hocog-Inos, Dr. Elizabeth Rechebei, Manny Borja, Tita Hocog, Diana Borja & Dr. Sandra Chung. To date, their combined efforts have resulted in identifying and defining more than 5,000 new words that are expected to be published as an update to the Chamorro-English Dictionary previously published in 1975.

Sablan has been teaching high school students Chamorro dance and leading cultural dance activities for nearly two decades and has represented the Northern Mariana Islands at a number of regional and international cultural festivals and conferences. She led efforts to organize dance groups as early as 1980 as a founder and manager for the Marianas High School Antigo Club Dancers, Napun Antigo Cultural Dancers and Man Antigo Cultural Dancers. Her leadership as a member and past president of the Pacific Islands Bilingual Bicultural Association was also a driving force for the creation of the INATUAS (Inheriting Natural Ancient Treasures Utilizing Ancestral Spirits) cultural dance group.

Her contributions as a Chamorro cultural practitioner has been recognized through her service as a judge for the Pã'a Taotao Tãno Dinaña Mina'gof Chamorro Dance Competition for more than ten years. In 2006, she received the Governor's Humanities Award for Preservation of Traditional Cultural Practices and in 2021, was featured by the Northern Marianas Humanities Council as a Cultural Icon of the CNMI. Today, Sablan's impact on the preservation and revitalization of Chamorro culture and language continues in her role as an Ocean Elder for the Friends of the Marianas Trench Project Hope, as a current board member for Chamolinian Cultural Village, Inc., and through numerous public cultural events in which she is invited to perform as an emcee, panelist, orator, and dancer.



MARIO BENITO

Preservation of Traditional Cultural Practices

Mario Benito is a traditional canoe builder of the Houpolowat clan, and its canoe house, Utt Wenimai in Polowat, an atoll in the central Caroline Islands. He also belongs to Utt Wenipukuw and Utt Hopweilol. He is a traditional navigator as well, educated in the Weriyaeng and Fenur schools of navigation. As a child he studied under some of the most famous and revered navigators from Polowat, including Hipour and Chief Manipy Rapung. In 2016, Benito achieved the rank of Pairoro or Master Navigator when he received his pwo from Rhaepin Woak or Grand Master Navigator Rainam Edward of Polowat. In 2019, Benito was elected Mayor of Polowat and is recognized as chief of his clan and Relong or the Northern half of Polowat.

Benito came to Saipan in 1980 and graduated from Marianas High School. In 2000, Benito, Talabwoh Chief Victorino Igitol and other local leaders initiated the millennium voyage 2000 to revitalize canoe voyages between the central Caroline Islands and the Northern Mariana Islands involving three canoes from Polowat and three from Satawal. Benito served as one of the coordinators and translators in the building of the Lien Polowat in 2012 and its sail to Guam and final destination at the Oceanic Culture Museum in Okinawa. In 2018, Benito joined navigators from Polowat and Lamaotrek in a voyage to Guam to attend the Festival of Arts and Cultures of the Pacific (FESTPAC) where he conducted information sessions on traditional sailing and navigation.

Benito joined 500 Sails to work in the boatyard building and maintaining Chamorro canoes. He has also conducted lessons in weaving and rope-making using traditional materials in various villages throughout Saipan. He is now building a Carolinian canoe using modern materials. The canoe, named Mikaela, follows the design of a canoe his grandfather built in Polowat, called Mikael. He feels a strong responsibility to share his traditional knowledge and acting on this he established "Sunday Sails", where his family and other volunteers provided the community with an opportunity to experience canoe sailing and also to learn how to sail a traditional canoe. He is also an instructor in two of the 500 Sails Cultural Maritime Training Center's "traditional" tracks: Sailing and Voyaging, in which students learn advanced open ocean sailing, and traditional navigation.



SOFINA QUITUGUA TOMOKANE

Preservation of Traditional Cultural Practices

Sofina Quitugua Tomokane is an avid traditional medicinal and cultural practitioner. She was nominated for perpetuating the knowledge and practice of using local medicinal plants to treat a variety of illnesses and for sharing her knowledge of making traditional personal adornment pieces such as the mwáár and lighatúúúr.

Tomokane learned about traditional healing practices from her mother Adela Ilisari Quitugua. She actively treats her siblings, children, and grandchildren, and tries to engage them in the process of identifying, collecting, and combining different components of plants to activate their medicinal properties. Over the years, a growing number of people outside of her family have come to her for their healthcare needs and she in turn has made efforts to expand her knowledge by incorporating traditional remedies kept by other local healers. Tomokane's daughter and granddaughter have acquired the knowledge from her for preparing the labatorio or sitz bath to promote healing among birthing mothers. As healthcare providers in the Western Tradition, they incorporate Tomokane's teachings and their indigenous knowledge into their practice. Tomokane believes her knowledge of traditional healing practices should be shared and perpetuated to benefit the generations to come.

Tomokane's knowledge of weaving mwáár and beading lighatúúúr necklaces was influenced by Margaret Titang. As a cultural leader in her own family, Tomokane designs unique pieces for members of her clan to wear at significant events. This tradition provides her with opportunities to teach others, especially her children and grandchildren, the skills and knowledge needed to source materials and prepare pieces that reflect the Carolinian cultural heritage. As a former member of the Talabwogh Dancers, Tomokane had also learned from and contributed to making mwáár and lighatúúúr to adorn dancers for their community performances.



**BEYLUL
SOLOMON**
**Research and
Publications
in the Humanities**

Beylul Solomon is originally from Eritrea in East Africa, but grew up in Ethiopia until her move to the U.S. at the age of 17. She moved to the CNMI in 2016 to work as an instructor for the Northern Marianas College (NMC). She is currently an associate professor in the School of Education's Rehabilitation and Human Services Program and principal investigator and curriculum developer for the NMC's BUILD EXITO grant which provides research training for students from underrepresented backgrounds in health-related fields. Solomon's expertise as a developmental psychologist provides her with insights into the growth and development of our community over the span of generations. She teaches her students how to approach current problems with research-based solutions and encourages the integration of indigenous-based knowledge, history, cultures, and traditions in the process.

Solomon is the lead author of "Indigenous Rights: A Vehicle to Address Mental Health and Academic Outcomes in the CNMI" published in 2022 as a chapter in the textbook, "Learning and Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education in Oceania". This work offers a critical analysis of how the CNMI's history has shaped current academic and health outcomes and proposes indigenous rights legislation and a new academic system informed by the CNMI's indigenous heritage as a solution to alarming educational testing scores and suicide rate disparities in the CNMI.



APRIL QUIAMBAO REPEKI

**Outstanding
Humanities Teacher
(In a Non-Classroom
Setting)**

April Repeki is a performer and choreographer of traditional Chamorro and Spanish dances and has contributed significantly to efforts by other dance leaders to revitalize elements of traditional dances that were lost due to colonization. She is manager, promoter, choreographer, instructor, and mentor to Simiyan Marianas, a popular cultural dance group comprised of youth and adults with a long history of performing at public events and representing the CNMI. In 2016, Simiyan Marianas placed 1st in Chant, 2nd in Poetry, and 3rd in Oratorical at the Guam Chamorro Language Competition. The next year, they placed 1st in Oratorical and 2nd in Chant. Repeki led the Songsong-måmi project, funded by the National Endowment of the Arts, which provided participating dancers with immersion into traditional seafaring culture to inform their dances. In 2022, the performances by the Songsong-måmi project dancers were featured at the Flame Tree Festival and the Pacific Mini-Games (PMG). Their performances during PMG provided participating countries and our own community with a beautiful and memorable display of Chamorro cultural dance at its best. Her choreography is currently featured weekly at Project Liffang held at the Carolinian Utt.

Her role in the sailing world has also identified her as an important leader in preserving traditional cultural practices. April has learned to sail traditional canoes and has progressed to mågas-in-training. She was part of the crew that brought Che'lu, the 47-foot sakman, from Guam to Saipan, a distance of about 130 miles in the open ocean. She also participated as crew in the first attempt to circumnavigate Saipan in canoes produced by 500 Sails. She has completed multiple sails between Saipan and Tinian and actively teaches others about her knowledge of sailing through sailing events organized for the general public, and is leading an increasing number of women in traditional sailing and navigation in the Marianas and possibly Oceania.



GLORIA SARALU RASIANG

**Outstanding
Humanities Teacher
(In a Classroom
Setting)**

Gloria Rasiang is of Palauan, Chuukese, and Carolinian heritage and speaks, reads, and writes fluently in Chuukese, Carolinian, and Chamorro. She has been a classroom teacher for twenty-six years, twenty-five of those years have been dedicated to teaching young students the Carolinian language and culture. She took a job as a teacher aide at Koblerville Elementary School in 1996 and within three months she became the sole Carolinian language teacher for grades 1-3. She served in this capacity for nearly twenty years before transferring to her current post as the Carolinian Language and Heritage Studies Teacher at Francisco M. Sablan Middle School.

Rasiang's mother, Delores, was also a bilingual teacher and remains her source of inspiration for teaching. Over the years, she has modeled teaching methods passed down from her mother to include singing and integrating vocabulary words into the rhythm of her students' favorite songs. As an elementary school teacher, she composed simple songs and prepared her students to sing and perform these songs on stage at school-wide events. In her current work with middle school students, Rasiang prepares students for the annual PSS - CCLHS Language and Cultural Performing Arts Competition. Over the years, her students have placed as champions three times in a row for the Essay category, twice for Story Telling/Poetry Dramatic Interpretation, twice for Contemporary Dance, and once each for Choral Reading and Cultural Dance.

Rasiang's commitment to teaching and excellence is rooted in her sense of responsibility for preserving and perpetuating the Carolinian language and culture. In the classroom, she is a force for continuity in the face of multiple challenges that threaten the survival of her cultural heritage. For young people, she is a beacon of hope to counter the trappings of social media and a society in which Refaluwasch values are systematically marginalized and diminished.

Rasiang is actively creating resources to supplement learning in the classroom and for parents and the community-at-large to have opportunities to learn more about the Refaluwasch language and culture. Between 2018-2019, she developed a script and was filmed teaching lessons as part of the Let's Learn Refaluwasch video series published by Rivera Pictures, Inc. She also wrote a book called Numwóre ló Ghiil Filooris to preserve the Carolinian words for flowers and villages on Saipan.

RECENT PAST AWARD RECIPIENTS

2021

Catherine Perry

Preservation of CNMI History

Denton-Joe O. Pangelinan

Preservation of CNMI History

Walt F.J. Goodridge

Research & Publications in the Humanities, Preservation of CNMI History and Outstanding Humanities Teacher

Antonio U. Pialug

Preservation of Traditional Cultural Practices

Dr. Sylvia C. Frain

Research and Publications in the Humanities

2020

Stephanie Soder

Preservation of CNMI History

Anita Ayuyu Sablan

Outstanding Humanities Teacher

Eusebio Camacho Borja

Preservation for Traditional Cultural Practices

Ambrose Milton Bennett

Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities

2019

Lynne Michael

Research and Publication in the Humanities

Emma Perez

Outstanding Humanities Teacher (Non-Classroom Setting)

Dr. Chas Algaier

Outstanding Humanities Teacher (Classroom Setting)

Eric Joel Reyes

Preservation of Traditional Cultural Practices

Dr. Boyd Dixon

Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities

2018

Don Farrell

Research and Publication in the Humanities

Gordon Marciano

Preservation of Traditional Cultural Practices

Galvin Deleon Guerrero

Preservation of CNMI History

Victor Cabrera

Outstanding Humanities Teacher (Classroom Setting)

Cecilio Raiukiulipy

Outstanding Humanities Teacher (Non-Classroom Setting)

Scott Russell

Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities

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Northern Marianas Humanities Council

Navigating the Human Experience

The Northern Marianas Humanities Council is a private 501 (c)(3) corporation established in the Commonwealth in 1991. It is the Northern Marianas Humanities Council's mission to navigate and explore the human experiences of the indigenous and diverse peoples of the Commonwealth by enriching their lives through research, dialogue, programs, and publications.

This program was sponsored in part by funds received from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in the program are those of the participants and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.



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