MESSAGE
FROM THE CHAIR

This past year has been a significant milestone for our community as we celebrated our 12th anniversary and charted a new path for greater diversity, equity, inclusion, and cultural sensitivity to promote the humanities through research, publications, dialogues, and programs on a variety of topics. Our efforts are all designed to examine the future of our community and how we interact as human beings across time and space and between languages and cultures, which demands more of our understanding, imagination, and hope for charting our future in the context of an interconnected and rapidly changing world.

We are in the business of storytelling. And while that work may seem consequential to some, storytelling profoundly challenges our understanding of history, shapes our present identity and values, and influences the decisions we make today that have immediate and long-standing implications for our future. The reverence in which we tell these stories is quintessential as it gives voice, visibility, and validation to the unique stories of islands and all who call them home. The council is committed to sharing the experiences of these diverse groups and individuals who share our moral and civic character and social norms.

We especially aim to capture a range of cultural expressions from individuals who are differently situated regarding their identity, history, and culture and look to capture the voices and stories of those who come from marginalized groups. With this, we aim to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the humanities and gain intercultural awareness and fluency with the people we share our home with.

As we move into a new era of technology, experience, and digital citizenship, we must ensure that tenets and values like family, respect, and social reciprocity remain part of our cultural fabric. We must think about the future and ensure that our ancestry, customs, traditions, and values remain sacred as we leverage the power of technology. And, as we grapple with and look to reconcile these challenges, we must also think about cultural stewardship and our identity and its significance within a global context. Our collective Pacific Islander heritage needs a strong coalition for more voice and visibility. The world would benefit significantly from what we, the diverse and indigenous population of the Marianas, have to offer.

We do this work with respect. In Chamorro, “go’imputtăng na’i baba i hinasso-ta yan i kurson-ta ya ta ekukungik i storían i tōto’i sīla. Epséla’i para ayu siha i taman pahum na hinneng,” which translates to its vital that we open our hearts and listen to the stories of others, especially those who have different beliefs than our own.

As we continue to navigate the human experience of the people of the Marianas, we remain committed to our Indigenous Chamorro and Carolinian values of malas maesol and tipsal - that is, to resolve conflict by caring for one another for the common good of all. I thank you all for your dedication and hard work in furthering the mission of the Humanities Council, and I look forward to another year of meaningful exploration of the human experience.

Yuyus ma’asii and ghilisew,

Bobby Cruz, Ed.D.
Chair
ACTIVITIES & OUTCOMES

Annual Progress Toward Achieving Strategic Goals

PRESERVING AND PROMOTING THE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AND CULTURES OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

- Island Time is a children’s show that teaches the Chamorro language through local actors, puppets, music, animations, and cultural demonstrations. The 40-minute film was first released on October 24, 2022 through a public film screening event at the American Memorial Park Visitors Theater.

- On June 2, 2022, Languages of Pride in the Marianas featured a public panel discussion to examine Chamorro and Carolinian words and phrases that reflect the identity and experiences within the LGBTQIA+ community. Presenters: Donald Mendiola, Kilismer/re Tuhuweltay, Frankie Eliptico, and Christine Tudela.

- The Council filmed interviews, presentations, and performances during the 2022 Ginėright Ha’äñen Taga Festival (October 21-23, 2022) to document and promote the significance of this annual event on Tinian. This year’s festival featured a community procession to Taga Park with Chamorro chants and dance to celebrate the installation of a 20-foot statue of Chief Taga on the edge of the Taga House ruins.

- The Council featured the work of the Tinian Cattlemen’s Association as a last installment of its CNMI Cultural Icons series. Large posters and social media infographics featuring the significance of raising cattle on Tinian today were distributed to schools, libraries, and cultural organizations.

- The 2022 Governor’s Humanities Awards recognized community members for their efforts to promote and preserve the Chamorro and Carolinian languages and cultures. Señora Frances M. Sablan received a Lifetime Achievement Award in the Humanities for her lifelong commitment to advancing the Chamorro language and culture. She was a ta’cain (prayer leader) in Nobenal Niño, a co-host for Prográman I Taotao-Ta’I Talk Show, a fofa’ Chamorro newspaper columnist, a contributor to the Chamorro Dictionary Revision Group, and a fa’afana’gui (teacher) of Chamorro dance and chants. Master Navigator Marlo Benito of Pulowat received the Preservation of Traditional Cultural Practices Award for establishing “Sunday Sails” for the community and sharing his traditional navigational and sailing knowledge as an instructor for the 500 Sails Cultural Maritime Training Center. Sofina Q. Tomokane received the Preservation of Traditional Cultural Practices Award for continuing the tradition of labardadu and for sharing her knowledge of weaving traditional Carolinian mwåar and lighatátu to mark special occasions within her family. April Q. Repeki received the Outstanding Humanities Teacher (In a Non-Classroom Setting) Award for choreographing and teaching Chamorro dance and sharing her passion and knowledge for traditional sailing. Gloria S. Raslang received the Outstanding Humanities Teacher (In a Classroom Setting) for her commitment to excellence in teaching the Carolinian language and culture at Francisco M. Sablan Middle School.

- The Council sponsored 11 events during CNMI Humanities Month beginning with a public proclamation signing ceremony featuring readings in the Chamorro and Carolinian languages by middle school students. Keynote speakers: Manny F. Borja and Cecilio Raikukulup explained the significance of the Santa Lourdes Shrine/ Ranun Gluven to the Chamorro and Carolinian people.

- The Rope of Tradition Program provided stipends for Chamorro and Carolinian cultural practitioners to demonstrate their knowledge of the language and culture in PSS Chamorro and Carolinian Language and Heritage Studies courses.

DEVELOPING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN LITERACY AND LANGUAGE

- Motheread/Fatheread CNMI implemented new goals and an evaluation plan to mark its 23-year mission to help families create a literacy-rich home environment. The program conducted adult courses and story exploring sessions with children in a curriculum designed to achieve this mission. By all measures, the program met goals focused on improving reading skills among both adults and children and strengthening family bonds and promoting the CNMI’s diverse cultural heritage through reading and storytelling.

- My Marianas Writing Contest provided opportunities for high school students to write a personal narrative essay on this year’s theme: food and family. Among the 63 essay submissions, My First Love by Aleia Hofschneider Santos placed first; Picky Eater by Lemusu Kit A. Tonomata placed second and; The Story of an Egg by Honey J. Satur placed third.
INCREASING PUBLICATIONS AND SCHOLARSHIP IN THE HUMANITIES

My Marianas Writing Contest winning essays were published in a booklet online at www.mnhcouncil.org with print copies distributed to schools. These essays also appear as special features in print newspapers and online through the Marianas Variety News & Views (https://www.sispantribune.com/index.php/the-story-of-an-egg/).

The Council conducted a study to examine media literacy, media use and perceptions, and civic attitudes among CNMI residents with Dr. Francis Dalisay of the University of Guam. The results of this study are published in 1 Minaghét: Ellet: Reporting the Truth in the Northern Marianas Islands report (https://www.mnhcouncil.org/media/survey2022).

Lotte in the Marianas by the community for the community, a book that examines contemporary interpretations and expressions of the ancient latte stones of the Marianas, was distributed at a public launch event on April 23, 2022 at the Joeten-Kiuyu Public Library. This work is a product of a grant awarded to Kelly G. Marsh (Taitano) and Jolee Linton.

Council Board Chair Dr. Bobby Cruz, Ex-Officio Chair Tracy Guerrero, and Executive Director Leo Pangelinan presented information about the history and impact of colonialism in the Marianas during a session at the 2022 National Humanities Conference in Los Angeles, California entitled: Fa'amatia: The Awakening of Pacific Islander Perspectives on the Impact of Colonialism on Culture.

Dr. Beyul Solomon received a 2022 Governor’s Humanities Award for Research and Publications in the Humanities for Indigenous Rights: A Vehicle to Address Mental Health and Academic Outcomes in the CNMI a chapter published in a book entitled Learning and Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education In Oceania.

PROMOTING DIVERSE EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES

The Council sponsored six weekly conversations with a diverse group of residents in A Part or Apart: Conversations on Belonging in the Marianas to pilot a civic reflection framework to build connections and understanding among participants, reflect on commonalities and differences, and encourage individuals to consider their civic duties.

Indigenous human rights lawyer, author, and Pulitzer Prize Finalist Julian Aguon took center stage at the American Memorial Park Theater to deliver the CNMI Humanities Month Keynote Address. Mr. Aguon expounded on excerpts from his newly published book, The Properties of Perpetual Light, during his talk to engage the audience with what he describes as “the work of bearing witness wrestling with the questions of one’s day, telling the children the truth.”

Marianas Stories featured Facebook Live interviews of people in The Marianas with extraordinary stories: building the karetan guika (traditional bullock cart) with Eusebio Borja; making coconut rope with Valerie Maliet; reviving i’a’u atapat (stone slinging) with Keith King-Nabora; a 50-year career as a baker with Ernesto Limeses; the history and features of caves in The Marianas with Fred Camacho; children with extra energy with Andrea Benavente; filing the role of mayor and proxy chief for the island of Polaawt with Mario Benito; working for the Center for Living Independently with Hannah Igaal; making papaya turnover and other Chamorro delicacies with Mary Naputi. Participating in the 2022 Pacific Mini Games with Soar in Oh and news reporting and editing in the CNMI with Zaldy Dandan.

Your Humanities Half-hour continues to feature weekly radio shows every Sunday at 11:30am on Power 99-97.9 FM to bring listeners into interviews that examine a wide range of topics. The past year, YHH featured 63 guests. The YHH Listener Survey was deployed during the month of October 2022 to obtain data about audiences, topics of interest, and areas for improvement.

Háyi Mon Chamorro a personal narrative by Executive Director Leo Pangelinan featuring elements of contemporary Chamorro culture and the Council’s film, Navigating Cultures: Seafaring Returns to the CNMI, were displayed in the BIBA CHAMORRÓ: Cultura e identidad en los Islas Marianas exhibit at the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Madrid, Spain (November 17, 2021 – March 6, 2022).

The Governor proclaimed September 2022 as We Will Never Forget: Field of Heroes Month and the Council participated with a keynote address by the Chair, Dr. Bobby Cruz and Program Coordinator Naomi Tudela as emcee. Proceeds from activities sponsored by the Tan Stu Lin Foundation are donated to the Council for veteran and first responder programs.

BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY FOR HUMANITIES PROJECTS TO THRIVE

The annual Seengeau Poetry Competition was held during CNMI Humanities Month with 12 competitors representing 5 schools. Kagman High School seniors, Danaheri Rodriguez and Juneya Quitano placed first in the senior division for their original poem titled, Woven Within. Francisco M. Sablan Middle school 8th grade student, Yu Rong Jiang, placed first for reciting, Searching, by Valentine N. Seengeau.

The Council’s “Commonwealth Center for the Humanities” project plan received an award for most innovative project and placed among highest priority programs to receive a grant for architectural and engineering designs and construction of a 5,000 sq ft facility.

Roberto E. Santos, Archive and Records Manager facilitated Finding Yourself in an Archive at the PIALA conference on December 6, 2022 which featured the Council’s Digital Archival Platform and its relevance to the community.

The Council subgranted a total of $203,935 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to help nonprofit organizations prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from the coronavirus.

The Council collaborated with Humanities Guahan to engage members of the CNMI community in Civic Reflections Facilitator Training to build local capacity for facilitating community dialogue which use reflective reading and conversations to open up important questions, expand imagination about future action, and build bridges of understanding in the midst of differences. Participants: Beth Demapan, Bryan Manabat, Catherine Perry, and Leo Pangelinan.

The Council was awarded a CNMI ARPA grant ($225,000) to support public access to digital media, increase capacity for outdoor humanities events and exhibits, and provide staff training and resources to adapt to the coronavirus pandemic.

2022 NEH SELF-ASSESSMENT SITE VISIT

The Council engages in a 5 year self-assessment cycle in partnership with the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Upon submission of a self-assessment report, the Council hosted an on-site evaluation visit between October 24-26, 2023 by Karen Kenton, Director of NEH Federal/State Partnerships; Mark Longo, Senior Director of Strategic Initiatives and Development; Administrative Management at the California Institute of Technology; and Dr. James Vierens, Deputy Director of the Pacific Islands Development Program.

FINANCIAL DATA

FY 2022 Revenue ($856,398)

- Private cash donations: $52,626
- Community grant in-kind contributions: $238,893
- All other in-kind contributions: $31,948
- Program income: $1,122
- CNMI ARPA Grant: $100,000
- Total expenses: $727,041

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