

Welcome 2026

President's Message

Greetings,

I hope everyone had a good start in the new year and is enjoying the early spring like weather. I'm very proud to announce, that 2026 marks the 20th year of the FANHS-Sonoma Chapter! The formation of FANHS started in 2004 when a group of former PYA (Pilipino Youth Alliance) members met to discuss preserving local Filipino history. PYA members were the children of the Manong's that had settled in Sonoma County. The PYA which formed in 1970, was dedicated to preserving Filipino history and serving the aging pioneer community. In addition to helping elders with home projects, and providing other support they began recording oral histories. But by the mid-70's PYA members began to pursue educational personal, and professional goals and the group eventually dissolved. The formation of FANHS opened the door to resume the preservation of local history and continues to this day. During the year, plans include re-visiting our organizations history and the work accomplished over the last 20 year's, and to expand our work to fulfill the mission of FANHS-Sonoma.

Sincerely,

Michael Vilorio
President

Meet the New Board

Michael Vilorio, President

Michael was born in Santa Rosa, California, the fourth child of Maximo, an early Filipino immigrant, "Manong", and Alicia Trevino, of Mexican-American descent and native of Laredo, Texas.

Michael has always been involved in community affairs both in his professional career as a Community Organizer and Labor Representative and his involvement in Sonoma County. Over the span of twenty-five years, he has served on the Boards of local non-profit agencies as well as the Filipino American National Historical Society, Sonoma County Chapter (FANHS Sonoma), and the Filipino American Community of Sonoma County (FACSCI). Michael is married and has three grown children and three grandchildren.

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Karen Pennrich, Vice-President

Karen has been actively involved with the FANHS Sonoma chapter since its founding in 2006 and has served on the board in various positions over the years. Deeply inspired by the mission of FANHS, Karen consistently encourages others to get involved. She is passionate about motivating community members to join the chapter and, importantly, to record their family's oral histories, ensuring that valuable stories and traditions are preserved for future generations. In addition to her local contributions, Karen previously served as a FANHS National Trustee, representing Northern California.

She was a member of the production team for *Remembering Our Manongs: Sonoma County's Filipino History*, a documentary that aired on PBS and continues to be distributed due to its lasting impact.

Karen also participates in Kalingaforia Laga, a weaving circle of Filipino American women dedicated to preserving, promoting and maintaining indigenous Kalinga backstrap weaving traditions, under the guidance of Master weaver and cultural bearer Jenny Bawer Young. Through this group, she has also learned traditional Kalinga songs and dances.

Karen considers it both an honor and a privilege to serve on the FANHS board.

Brenda Bautista, Treasurer

Brenda has been involved with FANHS, Sonoma for over 10 years and has been a Board member for most of that time. She was drawn to FANHS because "it gave me an appreciation and understanding of who I am and where I'm from."

Kalingaforia Laga is an organization that Brenda is close to and has been able to further her knowledge and respect for culture and tradition. Through the leadership of culture bearer, Jenny Bawer Young, Brenda has learned of the stories and struggles here and in the homeland. The efforts of our immigrant communities to find home and place resonated in the theme of the *Chewang Chi Biyeg Tapestry* which led Brenda to have it shown at *Makibaka: A Living Legacy* exhibit at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. The stories of the struggles to maintain identity, community and way of life needed to be shared. Brenda is inspired by FANHS' mission to preserve and tell history so we may never forget its lessons. She hopes to continue her advocacy for immigrant rights.

For a number of years, Brenda was a voice behind the Domestic Violence Hot Line and currently co-facilitates support groups for the YWCA.

Meryl-Mae Blomseth, Secretary

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Meryl-Mae came to Sonoma County in 2006 to study Psychology at Sonoma State University. A second-generation Filipina-American, she spent much of her educational journey learning histories that did not reflect her identity or upbringing. This experience pushed her to be intentional about reconnecting with her roots and reclaiming the stories that shaped her family and community.

For the past 15 years, Mae has served the Santa Rosa community as an elementary educator and now works as a coordinator at the Sonoma County Office of Education on a statewide equity grant initiative. Her work centers on uplifting voices and histories at the margins and empowering young people to feel pride in who they are. This commitment extends to her own family. As a mother of two, teaching her children their Filipino American histories and reading stories that reflect Filipino American life so they grow up grounded in culture and belonging.

A mother of two and partner to Mitchell, Mae and her family live in Cotati and enjoy time at Dillon Beach. She is honored to serve as Secretary of the Filipino American National Historical Society, Sonoma County Chapter, as she continues deepening her connection to culture, community, and story.

Manuel Weigel, Member-at-Large

Born in San Francisco and raised in Sonoma County, Manuel Weigel has been deeply rooted in community, culture, and creative expression since childhood. With family lineage tracing back to Siquijor in the Philippines, his commitment to Filipino American history is both personal and generational.

Manuel currently serves as a Field Representative in the pest control industry and brings prior experience as an Operations Manager and event organizer. His leadership background reflects a strong ability to build structure, mobilize teams, and create meaningful community engagement.

A lifelong advocate for arts and cultural education, Manuel has dedicated decades to youth mentorship and preserving oral tradition. Through hip-hop culture, arts programming, and community involvement, he has empowered young people to explore identity, creativity, and confidence while honoring history.

As a board member of the Filipino American National Historical Society, Manuel is committed to advancing history preservation, strengthening youth mentorship initiatives, and uplifting the arts as a bridge between generations — ensuring that Filipino American stories continue to be documented, protected, and celebrated.

MAKIBAKA: A Living Legacy

The Makibaka exhibition was a collaboration of SOMA Pilipinas and The Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. It opened on Aug 1, 2025 and closed in Jan 2026. Olivia Ongpin, Program Manager for Makibaka led a very informative, engaging tour for our chapter in early November. Makibaka: A Living Legacy was a powerful show of Filipino American history, art, activism, memory and movement. It highlighted the themes of resistance, resilience and the ever-present spirit of bayanihan. It was a nostalgic documentation of events that brought definition to SOMA Pilipinas.



“Makibaka means to struggle. To resist. To defy. It is a word rooted in collective action and spoken through generations of Filipino resilience. From the demolished walls of Manilatown to the contested grounds of South of Market, makibaka has never been a metaphor—it is a lived directive. A refusal to disappear. A demand to remain.....it frames legacy as an active ongoing struggle—one that is made and remade in real time by artists, elders, mothers, tenants, workers, and youth.”*

Jenny Bawer Young and Kalingfornia Laga were honored to be a part of this exhibit. The Chewang Chi Biyeg/River of Life Tapestry which is a weaving collaboration between the Mabilong Weavers of Lubuagan, an indigenous village in the Kalinga province of the Philippines and Kalingaforia Laga in the SF Bay Area. The tapestry represents two stories: One in Kalinga of the fight against the Marcos government to build a dam on the Chico River in the Cordillera Mountains which would have flooded the ancestral home territory of the Kalinga Province and the other of the eviction of the mainly Manongs living in the International Hotel in San Francisco. Chewang Chi Biyeg is an effective portrayal of makibaka as it pays homage to the struggles, strengths and determination of these two Filipino groups. The tapestry was completed in 2017 and unveiled at the 40 th Anniversary commemorating the eviction at the International Hotel. It is a reminder that the struggle for home and justice will always be a part of the history of our immigrant communities wherever they are in the world. “The South of Market neighborhood tells another story – one led by women, sustained by intergenerational leadership, and fought for in the face of urban renewal, tech booms and relentless displacement. This is a legacy not of monuments but of movement. A history not captured in textbooks, but passed hand to hand, mural to mural, protest to protest.”*

* “curatorial statement for Makibaka”

Many Moons Festival, A Celebration of Asian and Pacific Islander Cultures

This past October, the Many Moons Festival in Sebastopol, California brought together a vibrant gathering of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities to celebrate culture, creativity, and connection. The festival showcased the beauty and diversity of AAPI identities, with many cultures and community groups represented through art, performance, food, and storytelling.

We were honored to participate and proudly uplift Filipino American heritage in its many forms. Through our partnership with Kalingaforia Laga, we shared traditions in weaving and creativity. We were also thrilled to see FANHS Sonoma and Kalingaforia Laga members take part in the fashion show, highlighting Filipino creativity and cultural expression in a powerful and visible way.

Beyond the performances and displays, the festival created meaningful opportunities to connect. We were grateful to meet so many new community members who expressed curiosity, enthusiasm, and support for Filipino American culture and AAPI solidarity. The Many Moons Festival was a beautiful reminder of the strength that comes from gathering across cultures and celebrating who we are, together.



Eileen Tabios Book Launch

FANHS sponsored a book talk by Napa Valley writer-poet Eileen Tabios, who read excerpts from her book "The Balikbayan Artist." The event, held at Moonlight Farm in Glen Ellen was attended by educators, authors and community from the North Bay and Bay areas. Leny Strobel writes, "The novel breaks out of the confines of the modern/colonial frame and returns us to the wondrous world of myth-making. This is how Story becomes Medicine."



Translated into over a dozen languages, Tabios also has edited, co-edited or conceptualized 15 anthologies of poetry, fiction and essays, as well as exhibited visual art in the United States, Asia and Serbia. Tabios also founded the literary and arts press, Meritage Press; the poetry review journals *Galatea Resurrects* and *The Halo-Halo Review*; and the art gallery North Fork Arts Projects.

Tabios invented the "hay(na)ku," a poetic form in which the first line contains one word, the second line contains two words, and the third line contains three words, for a total of six words. Often considered an experimental writer, Tabios discussed what she terms her "abstract poetry" in an interview with Purvi Shah, editor of the *Asian Pacific American Journal*: "In poetry, I try to create an emotion that transcends the dictionary sense of what words mean

or what they typically evoke in the current cultural context. There are words that are beautiful outside their meaning, like azure or jasmine or cobalt.... For me, this is partly the place of abstract poetry, in addition to what's happening in that space between, words, lines, sentences and paragraphs." Her hay(na)ku poems have been collected in *One, Two, Three: Selected Hay(na)ku Poems* (2018).

Immigrants Rights Seminar

In partnership with the Japanese American Citizens League Sonoma County Chapter (JACL) and the Asian American Pacific Islander Coalition of the North Bay (AAPIC), an Immigrants Rights Seminar was held which featured presentations from local activists. The seminar provided attendees with valuable information about constitutional protections, legal immigration status, and immigrants' rights. Participants benefited from discussions led by immigration attorneys, a representative from the Philippine Consulate General in San Francisco, and the North Bay Rapid Response Network. The event was held at the Rohnert Park-Cotati Regional Library and was well received by those in attendance. The informative session helped foster a greater understanding of immigrant rights within the local community.



Windsor Day Parade

FANHS Sonoma participated in the Windsor Day Parade and Festival in downtown Windsor in September. Our entry featured two vintage vehicles, a 1948 Chrysler and a 1934 Ford, accompanied by members walking alongside. Aligned with the parade theme, "All Aboard for Imagination," the presentation invited the audience to envision life in Windsor during the 1930s and 1940s, when Filipino American pioneers first settled in the community. As the group passed the grandstand, key facts about local Filipino American history were shared with attendees.



Rohnert Park Pacific Islander Festival

In July, FANHS Sonoma participated in the Rohnert Park Pacific Islander Festival, held at the Rohnert Park Community Center. This fundraising event celebrates time-honored Polynesian traditions through music, dance, arts, crafts, and cuisine, bringing the rich cultural heritage of the South Pacific to the Sonoma County community. FANHS Sonoma members engaged with attendees, welcomed new members, and raised funds through the sale of lumpia and desserts.



Sonoma County Finding History Day

Sonoma County Finding History Day is an annual celebration of local history, bringing together dozens of historical societies, museums, archives, libraries, genealogical groups and cultural organizations from across the county.

FANHS Sonoma has participated in this event for several years and served as a sponsor at this year's event held at the Veterans Memorial building in Santa Rosa. FANHS shared Filipino American history through an information table and a presentation by President Michael Viloria.

Lunar New Year Festival

The Lunar New Year Festival was a joyful celebration of culture, tradition and we are deeply grateful to our partners at the Redwood Empire Chinese Association and the Sonoma County Museum for inviting FANHS Sonoma to be part of this meaningful event.

During the festival, FANHS Sonoma had the honor of highlighting one of our members, Dina Eisenhart (Villacort) and her family, who generously shared their family's Filipino recipes—lumpia and pancit—with hundreds of attendees. Through food, Dina and her family offered a tangible expression of Filipino hospitality, history, and care, creating moments of connection across cultures.

We are also thankful for the Sinulog Performers and their families who joined us and shared the beauty and depth of Filipino dance traditions. The performers from Petaluma presented Singkil, a royal dance originating from Mindanao in the southern Philippines. Singkil is a 14th-century Maranao royal court dance from Lake Lanao, Mindanao, celebrating Princess Gandingan's escape from an earthquake-induced forest crisis. It symbolizes grace and resilience, featuring dancers in intricate attire, wielding fans (apir) and scarves (mosala) while expertly navigating clashing bamboo poles. The dance represented cultural significance and roots. What made their performances especially powerful was the invitation extended to community members to join in the dances—learning, laughing, and moving together. The performers exuded joy and love, creating an atmosphere where cultural learning felt accessible, celebratory, and deeply human.

We were also pleased to see FANHS Sonoma and Kalingafornia Laga members participate in the program by sharing traditional Kalinga songs led by Jenny Bawer Young.

The Lunar New Year Festival was a beautiful reminder that when we share food, stories, and movement, we build bridges of understanding and belonging.



FANHS Holiday Party

FANHS Sonoma hosted its annual holiday party in December. Members enjoyed a catered meal provided by Tambayan Filipino Eatery of Santa Rosa and participated in a Christmas ornament exchange. The event offered a wonderful opportunity for members to connect and celebrate together, fostering fellowship among both new and long-time friends.

