

Community Editor

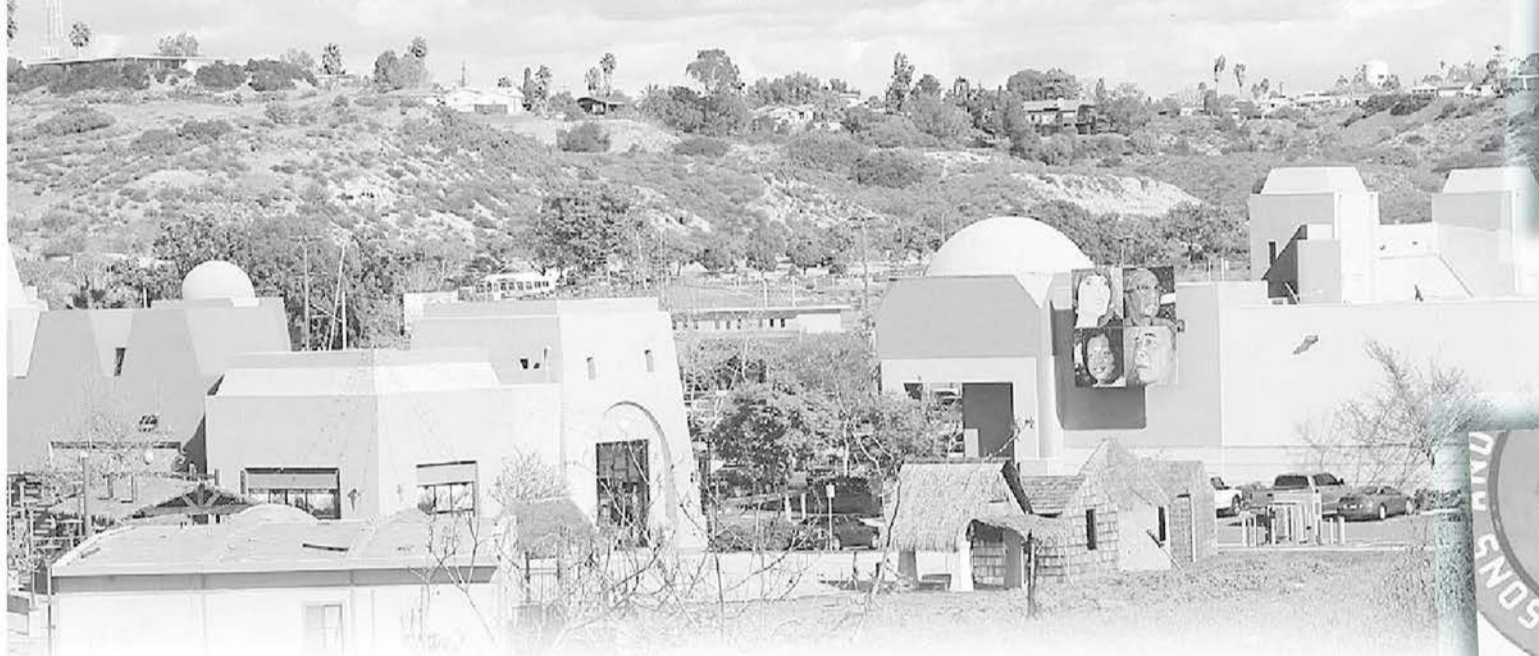
Duane M. George

479-0415

dmgeorge@guampdn.com

LIFESTYLE

Sons and Daughters of Guam



Left. The view of the Chamorro Cultural Fest grounds with the Guma Chamorro latte structure in the foreground.



Above: SDGC President, Jess (Batiak) Cruz.



Above: Pacing and Manuel Reyes are longstanding members of the Sons and Daughters of Guam Club.

San Diego group a home away from home

By Sandy Flores Uslander

Far away from Guam and the Marianas is a special place where Chamorros can feel right at home. Atop a hill in a culturally diverse section of east San Diego you can see the Guam flag and the CNMI flag flying high alongside the U.S. and California state banners.

There is a complex of buildings on the surrounding two-and-a-half acres, with a scattering of latte stones constructed among them. The large pavillion is complete with kitchen and bar facilities. The main clubhouse is situated in the center of it all.

Entering the club hall, it looks like many community centers, but once inside you come upon an entire wall painted with a familiar tropical coastline and large latte stones. A niche with Guam's patron saint, Santa Marian Kamalen, is in one corner. You might even hear someone speaking Chamorro.

Here, Chamorro people have been gathering for decades. It is the site of annual village fiesta celebrations, novenas, Liberation Day festivities and even Chamorro language classes.

The largest events can bring hundreds of Chamorros and their friends to this cultural oasis. The intricate coordination of everything from event permits to parking to food preparation is a marvel of community cooperation.

How it all began

The beginning of this home away from home was nearly 60 years ago in the north county of San Diego, with a conversation be-

tween Joe Flores (familian Cabesa) and Gil Taitano (familian Calastro) who were in the Marine Corps, stationed at Camp Pendleton.

These recognized founders of what has become the Sons and Daughters of Guam Club conceived an organization that would support the community to be successful in mainstream America while still keeping the customs of their Chamorro heritage.

The original organization was known as the Guamerica Club.

The club's first event was a Liberation Day dinner dance at El Cortez hotel in San Diego on July 18, 1953, where Nora Hertero Peterson was crowned as the club's first Liberation queen.

Today

The Sons and Daughter of Guam Club moved into its current home in the mid-

1970s. The property consisted of a large house on a large piece of land at the end of Willie James Jones Avenue in what is known as Lincoln Park in San Diego.

The pavillion and related structures were built in the mid-1990s. The latte entrance to the pavillion was added just five years ago. There are more than 250 current members who are invited to the club's monthly general assembly meeting.

On a day last week, the Sons and Daughters of Guam Club was holding its regular senior luncheon. In cooperation with the local Union of Pan Asian Communities agency, meals are provided three days a week at a small cost for the attendees. According to Program Director Teresa Lucas,

the club is one of the few remaining sites for this type of service, due to the willing volunteers and the clubhouse facility.

Lucas has found the family support for the senior community to be tremendous, from the young kitchen volunteers to the site supervision by Pacing Ramirez (Cruz) Reyes, one of the longest-standing club members.

The club has an events calendar maintained by volunteer Benni Benavente Schwaab, called the Kalendarion Inetnon Chamorro — San Diego that is packed with a series of novenas, annual fiestas and regular fundraisers. The facility also provides space for community outreach, spontaneously hosting cultural performers or education.

In the last year alone, the club has hosted a delegation of Guam dancers and fea-

tured a number of speakers — from local Mario Borja of the San Diego Sakman Canoe to Cel Aguigui of the National Organization of Chamorro Veterans in America, from Washington, D.C.

Recently, a Chamorro language program has begun holding classes on Saturday mornings.

The future

The current club president, Jess (Batiak) Cruz, looks ahead to the Sons and Daughter of Guam Club of the future. Priorities include how to expand the facilities, providing a cultural museum, providing a computer lab and, most importantly, how to bring the next generation of Chamorros into the club.

It is clear to him that attracting the youths and younger adults is essential to the club's



Uslander



Above: Juan Paulino is one of the many longstanding members of SDGC.