

NOCVA News

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION of CHAMORRO VETERANS IN AMERICA
NATIONAL OFFICE NEWSLETTER



FROM THE FOUNDERS

Cel Aguigui, Larry Cruz, and Frank Blas

As a national organization dedicated to empowering Chamorro veterans, NOCVA has surpassed any other attempt to organize, promote, and advance the welfare of Chamorros in the United States. Since its inception in September 2011, NOCVA has had several significant accomplishments and is getting the attention of the media, elected officials, and most importantly -- Chamorro veterans.

Our mission continues to inspire others to join us, with many Chamorro veterans stepping forward, willing and eager to help build our grassroots organization. Although the growth of our membership is encouraging, the size of our national office remains the same. This presents several challenges. Although there are countless things we can do, given our limited resources, we must decide which efforts will serve our mission and move our vision forward. Our national office constantly prioritizes activities to keep pace with the growing demand for information and involvement. One of our biggest challenges is telling members about the work that's being done on their behalf in a thorough and timely manner.

To fix this problem, we have initiated a monthly newsletter – the *NOCVA News* – to help us share news and information with our regional coordinators and members. Robust and frequent communication between the national and regional offices will benefit all of us and help in the recruitment of new members. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

RECOGNITION for NOCVA

Hon. Aline Yamashita (32nd Guam Legislature), introduced a resolution recognizing NOCVA's efforts to serve as the voice of Guam and CNMI veterans and their families. The resolution recognizes work done by NOCVA's National Staff, Regional Coordinators, and members who have volunteered their time and expertise to establish NOCVA. Two NOCVA coordinators, **Bill Cundiff** (Guam) and **Tony Leon Guererro** (Washington), attended the presentation held on 8 July in Agana, Guam.



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NATIONAL OFFICE ACTION ITEMS

NON-PROFIT STATUS

NOCVA national office submitted its application and fee of \$850.00 to the IRS on 29 June 2013. The application review process can take up to six months. Once approved to operate as a national non-profit organization, NOCVA will be able to:

- a. Improve the administration and management of NOCVA, both nationally and locally
- b. Provide training and assistance to Chamorro veterans in applying for and processing their claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs
- c. Educate NOCVA members, supporters, and Friends of NOCVA on the U.S. political process and encourage participation through voting, developing relationships with elected leaders both in Congress and the administration as well as at the state and local government level
- d. Seek resources and grants to provide scholarships and additional appointments to military academies
- e. Seek opportunities for members to serve in citizen advisory boards, commissions, and other public forums

Support as requested

NOCVA national coordinators provided **Joanna Torre**, NOCVA regional coordinator (Northern California), with background information in preparation for a meeting she initiated with *Rep. Ami Bera -7th District, Sacramento, CA*.

OUTREACH

NOCVA national office staff made the following visits to meet with Chamorro veterans and recruit new members:

- Ft. Lee, Hopewell, VA (13 Jul)
- U.S. Coast Guard Station, Alexandria, VA (20 Jul)
- Ft. Bragg, Fayetteville, NC (29 Aug)
- Ft. McClelland, Weaver, AL (30 Aug)

OFFICIAL NOCVA COMMUNICATIONS

One of our immediate concerns is developing an effective communication system between the national office and regional coordinators located around the country.

Official information from the national office to the coordinators will be issued only by the three founders or their designated representatives. Similarly, official communication from the chapters should come only from the coordinators or their designated representatives.

We are drafting a description of the powers reserved to the chapters and the national office as well as the limitations for both. As a non-profit, tax exempt organization, both national office and chapters are required to follow certain rules, regulations, and restrictions.

CHELU, WE REMEMBER YOU

NOCVA members in California presented a tribute to honor **John Meno Cruz, Captain, USAF (Ret.)** on 9 August 2013. We thank John for his service to our country and are grateful for his dedication in helping build NOCVA; he served as a NOCVA Regional Coordinator in California. To view the tribute, please see YouTube link at <http://youtu.be/C3xa5wl76Sg> Chelu, you will be missed!

CAPITOL HILL - LEGISLATIVE NEWS

NOCVA's mission to improve the quality of life for Chamorro veterans and their families relies on organizing at the grassroots level and building political clout with U.S. leaders.

NOCVA's national coordinators are in frequent contact with members of Congress who are in positions to help NOCVA. It is important to understand how the U.S. political process works. If you are a U.S. citizen and you live in one of the 50 states, you can exercise your right to vote in U.S. elections and thereby influence legislation in your favor. U.S. citizens living in the states are represented in Congress by two senators from each state and the representative from their individual congressional district.

Chamorro veterans and their supporters who live in the states need to know that the senators and district representative from their state are the ones who represent them in Congress, and they are the ones that will try to help you should you need assistance.

CONGRESSIONAL VISITS/ACTIONS

- *Sen. Harry Reid-NV, Majority Leader, U.S. Senate:* Courtesy visit in conjunction with first NOCVA conference (Mar 2013) in Las Vegas, NV; briefed staff on NOCVA
- *Rep. Jeff Miller, Chairman, House Veterans Affairs Committee:* Met with committee representatives and presented position paper outlining challenges facing Chamorro veterans in islands when accessing VA benefits and services
- *Rep. Steny Hoyer-MD, Minority Whip Leader:* Attended reception he hosted
- *Sen. Brian Schatz -HI:* Sent letter requesting that contributions of Chamorros be included in bill he introduced (S. 1046) that seeks to recognize Native Hawaiians, Native Alaskans, and Native Americans for their contributions in the defense of our country; asked him to correct the record to include the sacrifices of Chamorro servicemen and women and to include them in future initiatives
- *Rep. Mike Honda-17th District, San Jose, CA:* Requested courtesy visit to brief him on NOCVA, since a significant number of Chamorros live in his district

www.nocva.org

Our website continues to be the main source of historical and archived information about NOCVA. We urge you to refer back to it periodically for specific and updated information about our Mission and Vision, organizational structure, past events, various initiatives, and membership.

VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

NOCVA meets periodically with the VA Secretary (through the VA Roundtable) and with VA representatives to discuss the needs of Chamorro veterans to ensure that they receive the recognition and benefits they have earned. These activities include:

- a. *VA Health Survey* - NOCVA national coordinators provided input on health-related issues specific to Chamorro veterans, using feedback received from NOCVA members
- b. *Secretary of Veteran Affairs Minority Advisory Board* - NOCVA was asked to submit a candidate to serve in this high-level role; we have recommended **Mario Borja**, NOCVA's Senior Coordinator/Adviser, San Diego Chapter
- c. *Summit meeting on mental health* - NOCVA national coordinators participated in a national forum with representatives from other veteran groups to discuss mental health problems affecting veterans
- d. *VA Center for Minority Veterans* - NOCVA national office continues to partner with VA Liaison Officer **Ron Sagudan** to access the VA center's services to help Chamorro veterans

CHAMORRO VETERAN WOMEN'S ADVISORY GROUP

Terri Smith, NOCVA's Senior Adviser for Chamorro Women Veterans, met with directors of the VA Center for Minority Affairs (*Barbara Ward*) and Center for Women Veterans (*Dr. Irene Trowell-Harris*) on 11 June.

Terri successfully established a relationship between NOCVA and these organizations that are trying to reach out to veterans, especially women and minorities. Through this ongoing relationship, NOCVA will be able to share regular and timely information on a variety of issues of interest to Chamorro veterans.

New NOCVA Technical Adviser for VA Benefits and Compensations

Frank Flores has joined NOCVA's efforts to help Chamorro veterans navigate the complicated VA claims process. With his past career experience in the VA, Frank is well versed in all aspects of the VA disability system as well as all administrative and procedural applications.

He will develop plans and policies that will enable NOCVA chapters to establish a system to help Chamorro veterans access available benefits and compensation programs. Frank lives in Las Vegas, NV.

NOCVA NATIONAL OFFICE STAFF

Celestin “Cel” Rivera Aguigui, *Founder/National Coordinator*

Lorenzo “Larry” Concepcion Cruz, *Founder/National Coordinator*

Francisco “Frank” Dumanal Blas, *Founder/National Coordinator*

Norma Jeter, *Executive Administrator*

Jerry Cruz, *Website Developer*

Libby Aguigui Nau, *Editor/Media Relations*

Terri Smith, *Chamorro Veteran Women’s Advisory Group*

Frank Flores, *Technical Adviser for VA Benefits and Compensations*

Lou Barrett, *Adviser*

Rick Perez, *Adviser*

NOCVA is a non-political, non-partisan national advocacy organization based in the Nation’s capital that seeks to unite and organize Chamorro veterans and their supporters to leverage their collective political influence in the U.S. to work on behalf of the Chamorro people – in the US, in Guam, and in the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI).

To become a member, visit our website at www.nocva.org to download a membership form.

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