

In Honor of DOMINGO LOS BAÑOS

When Domingo Los Baños entered the University of Hawai‘i as a freshman in 1944, he was one of only five Filipino students on campus. He vowed then, to make it part of his life’s mission to encourage more Filipinos – and other young people – to pursue higher education.

He volunteered to join the U.S. Army that same year, and was assigned to the 1st Filipino Infantry Regiment in his father’s homeland of the Philippines. After the war ended, he pursued a degree in physical education at Springfield College and Columbia University.

After graduation, he returned to Hawai‘i to fulfill his dream of being a teacher. Over the years he rose through the ranks of the Department of Education. When he reached the level of administrator, he was awarded a fellowship in school administration at Stanford University. Los Baños eventually became the state’s first Filipino principal and district superintendent. He retired in 1975 after more than 30 years as a public educator.

A few years later in 1980, Los Baños was part of a think tank of prominent Filipino leaders tasked with finding a way to recognize high-achieving Filipino youths, as part of the 75th anniversary of the Filipino migration to Hawai‘i.

“The anniversary planning committee was tired of one-shot deals; the same song-and-dance,” said Los Baños. “They wanted us to find a sustainable program with long-lasting impact.”

With that in mind, the group of leaders sought input from UH students, asking them, “What are the problems facing Filipino youths and how do we solve them?” Their initial meeting with students did not go as he had envisioned.

“First off, they asked me ‘Mr. Los Baños, who are you and why are you here?’ The second more biting query was, ‘What’s in it for you?’ It completely blew me away that the students of their generation did not trust their Filipino elders. At the same time I respected their brashness and honesty.”

At first, the group of leaders suggested to the students that they convene a statewide youth congress to identify high-achievers. But the student leaders took that idea a step further and decided that they should create a program to reach Filipino youths who had the *potential* to be high-achievers. They called the new program “Sariling Gawa,” Our Own Work.

Through the years, Los Baños has watched Sariling Gawa delegates morph into leaders, celebrate marriages and births, and pass the torch of leadership on to the next generation. He admires the integrity and dedication of these leaders. “I’m so proud of the fact that everyone involved with Sariling Gawa gives freely of themselves. They possess a sacrificial heart that beats not for themselves but for the service of others.”

Los Baños currently serves as a docent at the Hawai‘i Plantation Village in Waipahu and as chaplain of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1572. He and his wife of 50 years Mary live in Pearl City. They have four children, ten grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Los Baños would like to share this honor with his wife Mary, founder and president of The Children’s House. Her love, support and encouragement gave him free reign to pursue his passions in life.

