

The Philippine Volunteer Fire Brigade, Inc., in Brief

The wrath of fire chooses neither country nor race, neither rich nor poor neither place nor time. The moment it strikes, lives are often taken away while properties are burnt down to mere ashes. For a tropical country like the Philippines, these fires are not uncommon, with numerous occurrences a day, especially during the summertime.

In the 1960's, there were only a handful of fire-fighting teams in the Philippines. During those times, there were no advanced equipments to speak of. The most there was were water pumpers, which did little in putting out big fires. The people could only watch as the fires relentlessly swallowed up their homes and properties. With this situation growing at an alarming rate, a group of people decided that they could not just watch and do nothing. They saw the necessity to work together as a team, relying on their own resources, to combat this natural force that has caused immeasurable casualties. On March 01, 1976, five active fire-fighting groups in the community united under the name ***Association of Philippine Volunteer Fire Brigades, Inc.*** They were:

- South San Nicolas Fire Prevention Association, Inc.
- Pasay Volunteer Fire Brigade
- Manila Zone 28 North Binondo Fire Prevention Association
- East Binondo Fire Prevention Association
- New Market Merchants Association Fire Prevention Unit

Since its establishment, the association has come up and has lived by the mission of (1) helping government fire fighters in saving lives and properties during fire disasters and (2) providing the society with free and voluntary service. Throughout the years, the association has gained recognition and support from the public, allowing it to expand from the original five brigades into 37 affiliated brigades all over the country. This expansion has allowed more convenient service to citizens 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Fire fighting is not an easy task. It entails danger and threat to the life of the fire fighter. Every single time that he does his job, he puts his life at stake. To date, the association has lost five of its young and courageous fire volunteers while they were in the line of duty. With the association being voluntary in nature, the volunteers have joined on their own accord, expecting neither compensation nor reward. In cases of accidents, the volunteers could only rely on the generosity of the public for aid and support.

The public has not lacked in giving its fair share. With the tremendous provision and financial assistance extended to it, the association was able to widen its services and influence all over the country. On its 20th anniversary in 1996, the association reached yet another milestone as it established its first ever foundation, the ***Association of Philippine Volunteer Fire Brigades Foundation, Inc.*** Since then the Foundation was able to provide the needed care and assistance for its volunteers especially those who have suffered injuries while in the line of duty.

As the number of member fire brigades increased, the need for a bigger space became more imminent. It was on the Association's 24th anniversary that the proposal to construct an official headquarters was

initiated. The proposition was greeted with utmost delight and approval. Almost immediately, generous assistance started pouring in. Everyone was eager to contribute his share to help realize the dream of providing better services to the citizens of the society. On the 30th day of October in 1999, a ground breaking ceremony was held at the building site, with the honorary Dr. Lucio Tan as the guest of honor. Four months later, the construction of the new headquarters was underway. On February 25, 2001, almost a year since it began, the Association headquarters was finally completed and inaugurated. After 25 years of hardship and sacrifice, the Association and its members finally had a place they can call home.

Since its conception, the Association has garnered profuse praise and commendations from both the prominent and commoners. In 1993, a presidential citation award was given to the Association for its services to the community by then President Fidel V. Ramos. Likewise, in August 2000, Ateneo de Manila University presented the Association with a public service award, praising the courageous Filipino Chinese Volunteer fire fighters for their profound belief in the value of volunteerism in a society that has yet to learn to work together for the public good; for their remarkable courage in fleshing out this spirit of volunteerism through the fire brigades all over the Philippines; and for their deep commitment to service to the community without seeking any reward and thus providing to all and sundry that public good is a lofty goal.

Looking back, the past thirty years had not been an easy journey. The fire fighters have taken the road less travelled, so to speak. Despite the pain and difficulty however, the honor and recognition they have garnered would remain forever in their hearts, motivating them, inspiring them. In the years to come, the Association promises to continue its services to and to live by its goal of providing utmost service to its fellow citizens.