

## The Southern District of West Virginia Celebrates Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Asians and Pacific Islanders make up the fastest growing racial group in the United States, numbering more than 10 million people or nearly 4 percent of the total population. The diverse Asian American and Pacific Islander American population includes members of more than 30 ethnic groups who speak more than 300 languages and dialects.



Asian Pacific American Heritage Month is a time to honor the contributions, heritage, traditions of Asians and Pacific Islanders. One of the reasons May was chosen for this celebration was to pay tribute to the first Japanese immigrants, who came to the United States in May 1843. However, in honor of the guest speaker, the theme for this year's celebration was the Philippines.

On May 31, 2017, Terry Deppner, Clerk of Court, gave the welcoming remarks, thanking those in attendance and introducing Sophia Tran as the main coordinator of the Asian Pacific American Heritage Month and Guest Speaker, Edwin DeQuiros. Sophia then took to the podium and provided more in depth information.

Edwin DeQuiros was born and raised in Manila, Philippines. Edwin's dream was to live and work in the United States. After applying for a travel visa three times with the U.S. Embassy in Manila and being denied each time, Edwin thought that his dreams would never come true. Everything changed however on January 3, 1981. On this day, Edwin would meet the love of his life and soon marry her 17 days after their first encounter. Christine, Edwin's wife, is an American woman who was born and raised in Charleston, West Virginia. She was visiting the Philippines to shoot a television commercial for a well-known liquor company. After marrying the couple decided to ask the consulate in Manila if Edwin could have a Visa. Edwin was once again denied and blacklisted; the consular officer thought the marriage was a fraudulent plot to bring Edwin to America. Of course, this was not the case; but Christine refused to leave without Edwin so she stay in the Philippines with him. Their first child was born on November 19, 1981.



In May 1982, Edwin received a letter in the mail stating that his case had been reopened by the consulate and he would be able to come to the United States soon after that. The U.S. Embassy had been investigating Edwin's marriage to Christine and found that his marriage was bona fide.



Edwin and his family first moved to Los Angeles, California. For the next 5 years, Edwin worked different jobs to support his family such as a merchandise handler, store security officer, and store security manager for the Broadway Department Store.

In November 1987, Edwin came across an ad in the L.A. Times for the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). They were hiring criminal investigators, known as Special Agents. Edwin became an INS Special Agent and was assigned to the Fraud Unit of the INS investigation branch, working as an undercover agent. He posed as an illegal Filipino alien, investigating corrupt immigration officers and immigration lawyers who filed fraudulent immigration applications.

When the INS opened their first office in Charleston, West Virginia, Edwin applied for a job and became the first INS Special Agent in this office. He served as a Special Agent for the U.S. Immigration & Naturalization Service for 15 years from January 1988 to February 2003 and served as Senior Special Agent for U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) for 5 years from March 2003 to September 2008. After that, Edwin became a Court Security Officer for the Federal Courthouse in Charleston, West Virginia from September 2008 to January 2012. Since January 2012, Edwin has worked as an Immigration Services Officer for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Edwin plans to retire on or near December 31, 2021. Edwin also presented a PowerPoint presentation on the Philippines – At A Glance, its history, Filipino terms, festivals, traditions, culture and people.

In celebration, the walls were adorned with flowers and a native outfit that Filipino women wear for special occasions. Origami napkins propping the chopsticks were placed at each place setting. The catered luncheon included Pancit Canton, Lumpia, Pork and Chicken Adobo, Pinakbet, Filipino Ambrosia Salad, and, for dessert, Filipino Ice Candy.



Sophia Tran was assisted by other staff members, Genie Berger, Quitta Wilbourne, Kim Begovich, Evie Cooper, Chrissy Grace, Sally Page, Meg Kirk, and Lynn Cooper.