



# Honolulu Community Media Council

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## Ethnic Media: Twin Challenges of Serving Readers and Remaining Viable



(January 25, 2005 Honolulu, Hawaii) In its first public event since the start of the new year, the Honolulu Community Media Council hosted a luncheon panel discussion at the Pacific Club on January 18 that featured spokespersons from television, radio and print media dedicated to serving specific ethnic groups. The panelists generally were of like mind in painting a picture of a

environment in which they feel called to address the very specific needs of the communities they choose to represent while struggling to remain financially viable because they lack the large base or ratings needed to attract advertising revenues.

Jeff Chung, General Manager of KBFD, the Korean television station described how the station had started in 1976 to serve a very small Korean community numbering about 25,000. "Today, because of the popularity of the soaps and our decision to include English sub-titles, our non-Korean viewer ship outnumbers our Korean viewer ship," he said. "We still see our role as one of providing our original audience with a connection to news and the culture of Korea –but the unexpected expansion of our viewing public thanks to the soaps, has improved our ability to sell advertising and strengthen our bottom line," he added. Chung pointed out that the ability to attract increased advertising is particularly important given the significant financial burden of meeting FCC requirements to go digital, a requirement that will entail an investment of \$2.5 million by the station.

Jae-Sun Lee, Editor and Senior Writer for the *Korea Daily* commented that the role of her newspaper is more specific: to address the needs of those who read Korean and bring them news of particular interest to them within the Korean community in Hawaii, on the mainland and from Korea. Serving a very small segment of the population, about two percent, the *Korea Daily's* prospects for revenue remain limited even while its mission continues.



Memories of her own history as a refugee from Hungary drive Leona Jona, President and General Manager of KNDI radio, a station providing programming in several Pacific Island languages, Chinese, Filipino, Korean and Laotian to name a few.

“We can’t just go by the numbers,” said Jona, “we must address the need.” She described the need as being that of providing as much education and as much cultural familiarity and comfort as possible to immigrants far away from their homelands and eager to hear the sound of their languages. “I don’t understand some of the programs we offer because I don’t speak all those languages,” she said with a laugh. “But I believe it is important to keep doing it. It’s a labor of love and we are grateful for the effort so many volunteers make to keep this station going,” she added.

The *Hawaii Filipino Chronicle* takes pride in the fact that it has on its list of contributors, the Governor of Hawaii and the Mayor of Honolulu. “We are the only paper to have them both as regular contributors,” said Publisher and Managing Editor, Chona Sonido. “We think that reflects the importance of the Filipino community in the political life of this state.” Sonido likened the role of the Filipino newspaper to the Western press with a special focus in an election campaign, for example, on covering the candidates who don’t enjoy top billing in the mainstream press but who could be important in serving the interests of the Filipino community. Like the other panelists, Sonido stressed the importance of addressing the cultural needs of the community that are not as well served by the general media.



Leona Jona’s announcement that KNDO radio had just signed on Mercedes Benz as an advertiser provided a glimpse of better times ahead for the ethnic media as they garner more support from the community and find new ways to serve their publics. One approach suggested by Johnson Choi, President and Executive Director of the Hong Kong/China/Hawaii Chamber of Commerce was for the ethnic media to

look beyond the confines of their immediate communities and attempt to provide a picture of Asia that was more comprehensive and less fragmented. “This will help the people of Hawaii to broaden their understanding of Asia so that we are as well-informed as our very mixed Asian population profile suggests we ought to be,” he added.

Honolulu Community Media Council Chair, Beth-Ann Kozlovich who moderated the discussion promised that this was simply the first of what the Council hoped would be an on-going series of events that would look at ethnic media in all its diversity in

Hawaii.

The event was co-sponsored by the Asian American Journalists' Association, The Hawaii Korean Chamber of Commerce, the Korean American Coalition (Hawaii Chapter) and the Oahu Filipino Community Council.

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