SC CFCJC: Keeping Families Whole and Children Safe
Editor’s Note

One person once famously wrote, “it takes a village” to raise a child; for us, it takes a committee. This issue of BENCHMARK features the Supreme Court Committee on Family Courts and Juvenile Concerns (CFCJC), chaired by Associate Justice Teresita J. Leonardo-De Castro (Cover Story: Helping Establish Family Courts for the Filipino Family and Filipino Child by Atty. Maria Victoria Gleoresty Sp. Guerra) and composed of Justices from the Third Level Courts and RTC Judges designated to handle Family Courts cases, and other SC officials (Photos: Cover and Inside Cover). The Committee is mandated, among others, to fully implement Republic Act No. 8369, the law creating Family Courts, and to draft a plan for the organization of Family Courts.

For our featured Supreme Court office, we take a look at the Office of the Bar Conflidant (Decoding the OBC by Annie Rose A. Laborte); as a companion piece, we feature the Court’s new lawyers who either passed the Bar while employed with the Court, or entered the Court fresh from passing the Bar (Supreme Court’s New Lawyers by Atty. Anna Katrina M. Martinez, herself one of those Bar passers). We have two wellness related pieces, What’s for Lunch? Zumba by Tiffany Ines C. Atendido and Security and Arnis: More Than Just a Sport by Hannah Jill C. Garduque, which explore a different side of life at the Court. We end this issue with What’s in a Date? June 11 by Darylle Evie Mae C. Catabay where we look at significant events in history that coincide with the Supreme Court’s founding anniversary, June 11.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of BENCHMARK as much as we enjoyed producing it for you.
Decoding the OBC

When one hears “Office of the Bar Confidant (OBC),” it is the Bar examinations — the most prestigious and most grueling test conducted by the government — that first come to mind.

The OBC administers the Bar examinations to usually more than 6,000 examinees a year (as steered by the Chairperson on the Committee of the Bar Examinations, a sitting Justice of the Court), as well as takes charge of the oath-taking ceremonies and signing of the Roll of Attorneys of Bar passers. Only a few, however, are aware that the OBC is also tasked to perform other functions.

“People have the idea that, mainly, the OBC’s work is purely (working on preparations for the) Bar examinations. They don’t know that the office is composed of (four) divisions,” Deputy Clerk of Court and Bar Confidant Atty. Ma. Cristina B. Layusa points out. The OBC, a duly created office of the Supreme Court, is powered by a 40-strong lean and mean staff. It is housed at the third floor of the SC Multi-Purpose Building.

Atty. Layusa explains that “the Records Division keeps the record of all lawyers, while the Complaints Division accepts complaints against lawyers for investigation by the OBC upon order by the Court. The Bar Examinations Division, for its part, accepts petitions and processes applications of Bar candidates and submits them to the Court for evaluation.” The Bar Relations Division handles complaints against Bar examinees. The OBC thus helps the Supreme Court in disciplining the Bar by directly supervising the investigation of the complaints against Bar candidates and passers and members of the Bar upon order of the Court. The OBC is also tasked to monitor, update, and maintain statistical data pertaining to the Bar examinations and related Bar matters, as well as to update the list of the members of the Bar.

BAR COMPLAINTS DIVISION

From 2014 to October 2015, the OBC Bar Complaints Division had a total case output of 2,707, with 1,951 total pending cases, translating to a 58.11% case disposal rate of the 4,658 case input during the period, according to the OBC’s latest annual accomplishment report.

The same report also shows that from 2005 to December 2015, the SC has disciplined a total of 2,084 lawyers, with 170 disciplined in 2015 alone. These lawyers were either disbarred, suspended from the practice of law and notarial commission, suspended from notarial commission (alone), reprimanded, fined and reprimanded, admonished, fined and admonished, censured, warned, fined and warned, order arrested, or fined.

BAR RELATIONS DIVISION

This division handles complaints against Bar examinees and passers. For 2015, it had a total case output of 1,457 cases out of 1,512 cases, or a 96.36% disposal rate.

BAR RECORDS DIVISION

This division is in charge of the issuance of clearances for notarial commission and certificates including membership in the Bar, Bar ratings, and Bar records. For 2015, it has issued and released clearances and other communications totaling to 14,232 to its clientele.

BAR EXAMINATIONS DIVISION

Since it started accepting applications of those who are taking the 2016 Bar examinations last July, this Division has been busy with the preparations for the said exams. The 2016 Bar examinations will be the 115th to be held in the Philippines. To date, a total of 6,924 law graduates have applied to take the 2016 Bar examinations, which will be held on all four Sundays of November (6, 13, 20, and 27) at the University of Santo Tomas. More than a thousand Bar personnel and members of the National Bureau of Investigation, the Philippine National Police, and the Philippine Coast Guard, will be deputized to assist in the conduct of the said exams. This year’s Bar exams is chaired by Justice Presbitero J. Velasco, Jr.

Ever confident of her staff, Atty. Layusa enthusiastically says, “Since 2002, when I was appointed, this office has tremendously improved as to services in dealing with its people. The staff is more congenial, and I can assure you of their integrity.”
SUPREME COURT’S NEW LAWYERS

Throughout the years, the offices of the Supreme Court have served as formidable training grounds for lawyers who are on the cusp of their legal careers. The following are such newly minted lawyers of the Court who hurdled the 2014 and 2015 Bar Examinations.

2014

ATTY. MARIA ANGELICA ISAAC LIM-AGA
Court Attorney IV, Office of Associate Justice Estela M. Perlas-Bernabe

Ange earned both her Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies and her Juris Doctor degrees from the Ateneo de Manila University. Prior to joining the Office of Associate Justice Estela M. Perlas-Bernabe in 2012, she interned for various law firms and government offices where she handled civil, labor, and naturalization cases. Conversant in basic Mandarin and Fookien, Ange is an avid volleyball player who served as team captain of the Ateneo Law School Volleyball Team from 2009 to 2010 and is currently a member of the Supreme Court Volleyball Team.

ATTY. KATRINA ELAINE C. AGUILA
Court Attorney IV, Office of Associate Justice Alfredo Benjamin S. Caguioa

Before joining the judiciary, Kat served as Legal Officer of the Office of the President - Office of the Chief Presidential Legal Counsel where she directly assisted in the study of matters pertaining to the West Philippine Sea Arbitration, the Bangsamoro Basic Law, and the approval of public-private partnership projects. A licensed real estate broker, she obtained her Economics and Juris Doctor degrees from the Ateneo de Manila University. Kat was team captain of the Ateneo Team to the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition in 2013 where she was awarded Best Speaker in the National Preliminary Rounds.

ATTY. ANA KARINA P. BARTOLOME
Presidential Electoral Tribunal Chief Judicial Staff Officer, Office of Associate Justice Arturo D. Brion

A consistent dean’s lister, Ana earned her Bachelor of Science in Commerce, Major in Legal Management degree from the De La Salle University prior to taking up law at the same university. While in law school, she served as an intern for the Senate of the Philippines under the Office of Senator Richard J. Gordon in 2010 and for the Esguerra and Blanco Law Offices in 2013. She worked for the Senate of the Philippines for nine months as an executive assistant in the Office of Senator Sergio R. Osmeña III before she joined the Supreme Court in 2015.

ATTY. MINA FRANCHESCA D. BATUNGBACAL
Court Attorney V, Office of Associate Justice Lucas P. Bersamin

Before joining the Supreme Court in 2015, Mina was a junior associate at the Siguion Reyna Montecillo and Ongsiako Law Offices. She graduated cum laude from the University of the Philippines in 2009 with a degree in Sociology and obtained her Bachelor of Laws from the San Beda College Alabang School of Law in 2014, graduating as class valedictorian and recipient of the Judge Montesa Award for Most Outstanding Law Graduate. She also served as Editor-in-Chief of The Bedan Review, the official law journal of the San Beda College Alabang School of Law.

ATTY. DANIELLE D. CRISOSTOMO
Court Attorney V, Office of Associate Justice Marvic M. V. F. Leonen

Dana obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Journalism (cum laude) and Juris Doctor degrees from the University of the Philippines. Prior to working for the judiciary, she was an associate at the Feria Tantoco Daos Law Office where she drafted and filed pleadings in the courts and other tribunals such as the National Labor Relations Commission and the National Telecommunications Commission. She was Vice President for Public Relations of the UP Law Debate and Moot Court for three academic years and was an undergrad at the 2010 International Humanitarian Law Moot Court Competition.

ATTY. RAFAEL RODRIGO S. ESGUERRA
Court Attorney VI, Office of Associate Justice Arturo D. Brion

Digoy worked as an associate at the Dennis P. Manalo Law Office before joining the Supreme Court. A dyed-in-the-wool Green Archer, this alumnus of the De La Salle Santiago Zobel School earned both his Legal Management and his Juris Doctor
degrees from the De La Salle University. He was an instructor at the St. Dominic Savio College of Law and a lecturer at the DLSU Commercial Law Department. While in law school, Digoy worked as a research assistant to Dean Jose Manuel W. Diokno and was a member of the DLSU Paralegal Volunteers Organization. He is a keen golfer with a handicap index of 16.5.

ATTY. JAN RAPHAEL R. SALUD
Court Attorney VI, Office of Associate Justice Arturo D. Brion

Jay graduated from the San Beda College Alabang School of Law in 2013 where he was among the top four students of his class. He obtained his degree in Legal Management from the De La Salle University where his research paper entitled Paternity Leave for Unmarried Men: A Child’s Concern was awarded Best Thesis. Before working for the Court, Jay was a legal assistant at the Parulan Soncuya Rama and Trinidad Law Offices and at the Far Eastern Surety and Insurance Co., Inc. He currently is a lecturer at the De La Salle University, teaching Partnership, Agency, and Corporation Law to business students.

ATTY. JENIN ROSANNE H. VELASQUEZ
Court Attorney IV, Office of Chief Justice Maria Lourdes P. A. Sereno

After graduating magna cum laude from the University of the Philippines in 2010 with a degree in Broadcast Communication, Jenin pursued her law studies at the same university where she served as editorial board member of the Philippine Law Journal, as head magistrate of the U.P. Law Student Government - Student Tribunal, and as legal research assistant for the Office of the Dean of the U.P. College of Law. While in law school, she interned for the Office of the Solicitor General, MOSVELDTT Law Offices, and the Office of the Government Corporate Counsel. Jenin’s interests and advocacies include media literacy, legal education, and human rights. She is also a talented singer with the vocal range of a soprano. Her first job at the Court was with the Public Information Office (PIO).

2015

ATTY. RIZSA ROSE S. BAER
Court Attorney IV, Office of Associate Justice Marvic M. V. F. Leonen

Rizsa obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, Minor in Development Management, from the Ateneo de Manila University. Prior to his employment in the Court, Abe was an associate at Cruz Marcelo & Tenefrancia where he specialized in litigation, corporation and commercial laws, and intellectual property rights. He obtained both his Economics and his Juris Doctor degrees, with second honors, from the Ateneo de Manila University. This former member of the Ateneo Blue Babble Battalion sings and plays musical instruments such as the saxophone, piano, drums, and the guitar. He also speaks Filipino, English, Spanish, French, and German.

ATTY. DAN ABRAHAM G. GUINIGUNDO
Court Attorney IV, Office of Associate Justice Alfredo Benjamin S. Caguioa

Prior to his employment in the Court, Abe was an associate at Cruz Marcelo & Tenefrancia where he specializes in litigation, corporation and commercial laws, and intellectual property rights. He obtained both his Economics and his Juris Doctor degrees, with second honors, from the Ateneo de Manila University.

This former member of the Ateneo Blue Babble Battalion sings and plays musical instruments such as the saxophone, piano, drums, and the guitar. He also speaks Filipino, English, Spanish, French, and German.

ATTY. KAREN CHRISTINE S. RED-LOCK
Court Attorney VI, Office of Associate Justice Lucas P. Bersamin

KC earned her Bachelor of Science in Management Engineering degree from the Ateneo de Manila University and her Bachelor of Laws degree from San Beda College Alabang, where she graduated as class salutatorian in 2014. She served as Managing Editor of The Bedan Review and was the Remedial Law Subject Head of the Academic Bar Operations of the SBCA School of Law from 2013 to 2014. KC was an undergraduate associate at the Betita Cabilao Casuela Sarmiento Law Firm before she joined the Supreme Court in 2015.

ATTY. JANET DEE BANIQUED
Supervising Judicial Staff Officer, Office of Associate Justice Marvic M. V. F. Leonen

A native of Baguio City, Janet earned her degree in B.A. Communication, Major in Speech Communication, Minor in Broadcasting, cum laude from the University of the Philippines Baguio, where she was a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society and Argumentum, the U.P. Baguio debate group. She received her Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of the Cordilleras in 2014. She trained with the Cortes Law Office as a paralegal while in law school.
SUPREME COURT’S NEW LAWYERS

ATTY. AIZZA L. GONZALES
Legislative Staff Officer VI, Office of Associate Justice Arturo D. Brion

Aizza graduated from the University of the Philippines in 2008 with a degree in Political Science. She served as the Vice President for External Affairs of the University of the Philippines Kamagayan, the regional organization of U.P. students from Mindoro, from 2007 to 2008. She was also a member of the U.P. Gawad Kalinga. Aizza took up law at the San Beda College in Manila, graduating in 2014. While in law school, she worked as a clerk at Branch 20 of the Metropolitan Trial Court of Manila.

ATTY. JEANNE CARLA T. FERRER
Court Attorney V/Presidential Electoral Tribunal Chief Judicial Staff Officer, Office of Associate Justice Marvic M. V. F. Leonen

Prior to her employment in the Judiciary, Carla worked as an apprentice at Du-Baladad and Associates in 2012 and as an underbar associate at the Leynes Lozada-Marquez Law Offices in 2015. She also interned for the Office of Asia and the Pacific Affairs of the Department of Foreign Affairs in 2009. Carla obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science degree, magna cum laude, from the University of the Philippines Manila and was recognized as the Most Outstanding Political Science Student in 2010. She then obtained her Juris Doctor degree from the Ateneo de Manila University in 2014, graduating with second honors.

ATTY. MARANATHA PRAISE D. LADRINGAN
Supervising Judicial Staff Officer Office of Chief Justice Maria Lourdes P. A. Sereno

Praise earned her Bachelor of Secondary Education degree from the Mondriaan Aura College and her Juris Doctor degree from the Ateneo de Manila University in 2015, graduating with second honors. While attending law school, she interned at the Office of the General Counsel of the Securities and Exchange Commission and at Puyat Jacinto & Santos Law. Since 2004, Praise has been serving as administrative officer and teacher at Aeta Children’s Home, a Christian child-caring institution in her native province of Zambales that caters to the physiological, sociological, educational, and spiritual needs of indigent Aeta children.

ATTY. JO ANN FRANCES D. MADARANG
Executive Assistant V, Office of Chief Justice Maria Lourdes P. A. Sereno

Jo Ann graduated cum laude from the University of the Philippines Manila with a degree in Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences. She then took up law at the University of the Philippines College of Law, earning her Juris Doctor degree 2015. Prior to joining the Court, she worked as a consultant for the Office of Hon. Romero Federico Quimbo from 2010 to 2013, and for the Quezon City Council under the Office of Hon. Jesus Manuel Suntay in 2014. Jo Ann is a member of the U.P. Portia Sorority and the U.P. Manila Organization of Area Studies Majors.

ATTY. ANNA KATRINA M. MARTINEZ
Supervising Judicial Staff Officer Public Information Office

Karen obtained her Political Science degree from the University of the Philippines Manila and her law degree from the University of the Philippines College of Law, where her supervised legal research on the feasibility of the then proposed amendments to the system of national income taxation for corporations earned the Professor Juliana Ricalde Award for Best Paper in Taxation. Karen’s work in the P.I.O. includes her duties as editor of Benchmark, legal research, writing messages and speeches for the Office of the Chief Justice, writing and editing content for the communication and information materials of the Court, and writing this feature article.

ATTY. MEGAN DAPHNE D. MUSNI
Executive Assistant VI, Office of Court Administrator Jose Midas P. Marquez

Before joining the Supreme Court, Megan worked as a consultant for KPMG Manabat Sanagustin & Co., where she specialized in information risk management and advisory services regarding performance and technology concerns. A product of the Ateneo Law School Juris Doctor Program, she was co-chairperson of the 2013 Ateneo Central Bar Operations and was a member of the Ateneo Society of International Law, competing as oralist in the 2013-2014 VIS International Commercial Arbitration Moot Court Competition in Vienna. Megan earned her Communications Technology Management degree from the Ateneo de Manila University in 2007.
ATTY. MARY FELICCHI B. ONGCHUAN
Legal Consultant, Office of Associate Justice Jose P. Perez

Fel was a consistent dean’s lister throughout her four-year stay at the Ateneo Law School, receiving her Juris Doctor degree with an overall quality point index of 84.98. While in law school, she served as president and logistics operations manager of Cultura Verde Footwear, Inc., handling legal requirements imposed by the Securities and Exchange Commission and negotiating and drafting contracts with suppliers and retailers. Fel obtained her Bachelor of Science in Management - Major in Legal Management, Minor in Enterprise Development degree from the Ateneo de Manila University. She is fluent in English, Filipino, basic Mandarin, and basic Fookien.

ATTY. SHEENALYN R. TENGCO
Court Attorney V, Office of Atty. Jose V. Mejia - Judicial and Bar Council

Sheena finished her undergraduate studies at the De La Salle University, obtaining her degree in Legal Management in 2011. She took up law at the Ateneo de Manila University, serving as 4th Year Batch Representative to the 2014-2015 Ateneo Law School Student Council and as chairperson of the Ateneo Student Appeals Committee before receiving her Juris Doctor degree in 2015. Sheena worked at Ligon Solis Florendo Law as an apprentice in the summer of 2013. Her interests include political and corporate law, photography, sports, and fitness.

ATTY. MARLON IÑIGO T. TRONQUED
Court Attorney IV, Office of Associate Justice Antonio T. Carpio

Marlon earned both his Bachelor of Science in Management, Major in Legal Management and Juris Doctor degrees from the Ateneo de Manila University. While attending law school, he interned for the Claudio Teehankee Legal Center, the Father Joaquin Bernas Center, and the Ateneo Human Rights Center as desk coordinator for Katutubo (Indigenous People’s Rights). He was also a book editor at The Law Firm of Sarmiento Delson Dakany Resurreccion and a writer of The Palladium, the student publication of the Ateneo Law School. Marlon has been a member of the Philippine National Shooting Association from 2011 up to the present.

ATTY. GIAN FRANCES NICOLE C. VILCHES
Administrative Officer, Office of the Bar Confiendant

The daughter of the late Deputy Court Administrator Nimfa Cuesta-Vilches, Nicole has been working for the Supreme Court since 2008. Her duties in the OBC include processing petitions to take the regular and the Shari’a Bar Exams, reporting subsequent pleadings for agenda, and handling all matters relating to the Legal Apprenticeship Program in the Supreme Court and other collegiate courts. Nicole earned her degree in Bachelor of Arts, Major in Asian Studies from the University of Santo Tomas and her Bachelor of Laws degree from the Ateneo University School of Law.
A childless couple seeking to legally adopt a baby literally left at their doorstep. A 12-year old boy caught stealing bread from a local bakery for his starving siblings. An eight-year old girl choosing who between her legally separated father and mother she wishes to stay with. These are the kinds of cases that fall within the jurisdiction of Family Courts.

Family Courts tackle issues that, in the words of Chief Justice Maria Lourdes P. A. Sereno, “rend the heart and soul of our nation.” They are envisioned, among others, “to preserve the solidarity of the family, provide procedures for the reconciliation of spouses and the amicable settlement of family controversy.”

Nearly two decades ago, on October 8, 1997, Republic Act No. 8369, otherwise known as the Family Courts Act of 1997, was passed, providing for the establishment of a Family Court in every province and in every city in the country. The inundation on the Regional Trial Courts (RTCs) of general jurisdiction of cases involving the family and children as well as the need for judges specially trained to handle the said cases impelled the creation of the Family Courts.

Congress, however, failed to provide funding for the implementation of RA 8369. Instead, the Supreme Court had to designate 121 RTCs as Family Courts and draw from its own budget the upkeep of the said courts. As the designation of Family Courts is but a stopgap measure, the Supreme Court Committee on Gender Responsiveness in the Judiciary (CGRJ), created in 2003 or six years after RA 8369 was passed, adopted as one of the core strategies in its Strategic Gender and Development Plan for 2004 that it will “Organize regular family courts throughout the country.” To implement this strategy, the Court shortly thereafter established in the CGRJ the corresponding Sub-Committee.

Ten years passed before there was finally a breakthrough in the implementation of RA 8369. Fittingly enough, it was occasioned by two women. Justice Teresita J. Leonardo-de Castro, who now chairs the CGRJ, recalls that sometime in 2014, Chief Justice Sereno told her that she (the Chief Justice) was thinking of creating a Committee specific to the Family Courts, a Committee which the Chief Justice wanted Justice de-Castro to head.

By virtue of Memorandum Order No. 20-2014, the Sub-Committee on Family Courts under the Committee on the Revision of the Rules of Court and the CGRJ became a full-blown Committee and was renamed as the Committee on Family Courts and Juvenile Concerns (CFCJC). As Chairperson, Justice de Castro was given a free hand to implement the CFCJC’s mandate, which is as follows:

1. Formulate the Implementing Rules and Regulations and other rules for Republic Act 8369 (Family Courts Act of 1997)
2. Draft plan for the organization of family courts to include the following:
   a. Creation/Development of staffing pattern for family courts
   b. Determination of number of courts that must be created under national legislation
   c. Report on training needs assessment of all actors in family and juvenile justice sector
   d. Recommendations for infrastructure requirements for family courts
   e. Pilotting of family courts that will have ideal guidelines, resources, environment, facilities and staff for addressing family and juvenile justice concerns.
3. Monitor the implementation of the plan for the creation and organization of family courts including identification of procedural rules and court guidelines, as well as judicial and legal forms, that must be adopted to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of family courts;

4. Create such working groups as necessary to carry out its duties.7


From the outset, Justice de Castro determined that considering the magnitude of the resources required, a strategic plan was needed for the full implementation of RA 8369. For her, the first priority was to unburden the RTCs of family and children cases by organizing the Family Courts. Thus the CFCJC proposed to organize the Family Courts in tranches or phases, prioritizing judicial regions with high caseloads involving family and juvenile cases. Following its recommendation, the Supreme Court approved the organization of 48 Family Courts under the first tranche as follows: 1 court each in the cities of Caloocan, Las Piñas, Makati, Malabon, Mandaluyong, Manila, Marikina, Muntinlupa, Navotas, Parañaque, Pasig, Pasy, Quezon, San Juan, Taguig, and Valenzuela in the National Capital Judicial Region; 1 court in Aurora (Baler), 2 in Bataan (City of Balanga and Mariveles), 3 in Bulacan (Malolos City, City of San Jose del Monte, and Sta. Maria), 2 in Nueva Ecija (Palayan City and Cabanatuan City), 2 in Pampanga (City of San Fernando and Angeles City), 1 in Tarlac (Tarlac City), and 2 in Zambales (Olongapo City and Iba) in the Third Judicial Region; and 3 in Cavite (Trece Martires City, Tagaytay City, and City of Imus), 3 in Laguna (Calamba City, San Pablo City, and Sta Cruz), 2 in Batangas (Batangas City and Lipa City), 2 in Rizal (Antipolo City and Cainta), 2 in Quezon (Lucena City and Sariaya), 1 in Occidental Mindoro (Mamburao), 2 in Occidental Mindoro (City of Calapan and Naujan), 1 in Marinduque (Boac), 1 in Romblon (Romblon), and 2 in Palawan (Puerto Princesa City and Taytay) in the Fourth Judicial Region. These Family Courts have 729 plantilla positions including those for Psychologist III and Social Welfare Officer II.

The P355,494,000 budget for the foregoing 48 Family Courts3 has been included in the General Appropriations Act for 2016 (RA 10717), an example of how the executive, legislature, and judiciary can come together to improve the justice system of the country. The Judicial and Bar Council (JBC) has also started the selection process for the nominees to the judgship of these courts.

On August 2 of this year, the Supreme Court approved the creation of 50 more Family Courts under the second tranche as follows: 1 in Abra (Bangued), 2 in Benguet (Baguio and La Trinidad), 3 in Ilocos Norte (Laoag City, Dingras, and Batac City), 3 in Ilocos Sur (City of Vigan, City of Candon, and Narvacan), 2 in La Union (San Fernando City and Bauang), 1 in Mountain Province (Bontoc), 5 in Pangasinan (San Carlos City, Lingayan, Dagupan City, City of Urdaneta, and City of Alaminos) in the First Judicial District; 4 in Albay (Legazpi City, Daraga (Locsin), City of Tabaco. City of Ligao), 1 in Camarines Norte (Daet), 3 in Camarines Sur (Naga City, Iriga City, and Pili), 1 in Catanduanes (Vircay), 2 in Masbate (City of Masbate and Aroroy), 2 in Sorsogon (City of Sorsogon and Bulan) in the Fifth Judicial Region; and 2 in Bohol (Tagbilaran City and Ubay), 10 in Cebu (Cebu City, Minglanilla, Lapu-Lapu City (Opon), Mandaue City, City of Talisay, Toledo City, Danao City, City of Bogo, City of Carcar, City of Naga; and 7 in Negros Oriental (Dumaguete City, Mabinay, City of Bayawan, City of Guihulngan, City of Tanjay, Bais City, and Canlaon City, and 1 in Siquijor (Siquijor) in the Seventh Judicial Region.

For 2017, the Supreme Court requested P727,131,000 as budgetary support for both the first and second tranches of Family Courts, but the Department of Budget and Management drawn National Expenditure Program for 2017 allotted around half or P355,687,000 only, roughly the same in the 2016 budget. The final 2017 budget for the Family Courts is still being worked out. In the meantime, the third tranche of Family Courts is planned to be named in 2018. Justice De Castro, however, notes that there may still be a need for even more Family Courts, saying that there is only an ideal number of cases that each Family Court can handle.

With the organization of Family Courts already well on its way, the CFCJC is now reviewing the rules of procedure being followed by the designated Family Courts. Justice de Castro says that the CFCJC is looking at reform of existing rules of procedure by clarifying the proper application and interpretation of these rules; and if needed, legislative reform. She adds that it is crucial to get the inputs of Family Court judges because “they are the ones in the field conducting hearings.”

In this connection, the CGRJ, in coordination with the Philippine Judicial Academy (PHILJA) and in partnership with the European Union-Philippines Justice Support Programme, the Asia Foundation (TAF), the United Nations Children Fund, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) held The National Summit on Family Courts on September 16-17, 2016 at Crimson Hotel in Alabang. For the first time, the judges of the designated Family Courts had the opportunity to gather together and identify best practices and common areas of concern regarding the jurisdiction of as well as procedure in Family Courts as well as formulate recommendations.
to address these areas. Shortly after the holding of this Summit, the CFCJC constituted a Technical Working Group to process the Summit outputs and initially draft the rules for the Family Courts. The members of the TWG are Court of Appeals Justice Geraldine C. Fiell-Macaraig, Justice Mendoza-Arciga, DCA Aldecoa-Delorino, Judge Quimpo-Sale, Judge Pahimna, Judge Avellano, RTC Branch 16, Malolos City Judge Sita J. Clemente, RTC Branch 19, Cagayan De Oro City Judge Evelyn G. Nery, Retired Family Court Judge, Quezon City Judge Rosalina L. Luna-Pison, Atty. Ignacio, ACA Te, and Professor Feliciano.

This year, on August 4-5 at the Diamond Hotel, the CFCJC together with PHILJA and in partnership with the UNDP, the Australian Embassy, the Philippines, and TAF held the National Summit for Regional Trial Courts Handling Family Court Cases. It was attended by 154 judges of single-sala or multiple-sala courts handling Family Court cases. These judges validated the outputs of their fellow judges who had met at the October 2015 Summit on Family Courts as they arrived at the same issues and concerns and agreed on their colleagues’ recommendations, an indication to the CFCJC that it is on the right track.

This coming October 27-28 at the Manila Hotel, the CFCJC in coordination with PHILJA and old partners TAF and the Australian Embassy, the Philippines and new partners the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council and UNICEF will hold The 2nd Family Courts Summit. The 2nd Family Courts Summit is intended to apprise the judges of the designated Family Courts of what has been done to implement their recommendations and to share information of what came out from the previous Summits. Justice de Castro explains that The 2nd Family Courts Summit “is a follow up or progress report of both the [Family Court] judges and the Committee.” Aptly, its theme is Gaining Headway in Family Court Concerns. In addition, The 2nd Family Courts Summit will feature sessions on iGen, referring to the generation after the Millennials who use mobile technologies, and the online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC) to help bring the Family Court judges up to speed about current issues involving children. Like the previous Summits, the outputs of the Summits are used as guides for the CFCJC’s proposals and recommendations to the Supreme Court En Banc.

Justice de Castro describes the atmosphere in the CFCJC as collegial and open. She likes that her Family Court judge members are not afraid to air their opinions based on their experiences in their respective courtrooms. She has observed that all her Committee members are eager to make a contribution and praises them for being “knowledgeable and bright.” In turn, as Chairperson, she poses questions to them to clarify matters and uses her experience in the Supreme Court, the policy-making body of the judiciary, in helping find solutions to pressing issues and concerns. Justice Quimpo-Sale says that Justice de Castro “is very encouraging and inspiring because she listens to us as all members voice out opinions and share personal experiences. Then she tells us what she thinks. She may disagree with an opinion, but she says it in a way that doesn’t discourage the member from further speaking up. We then get the opinion of the majority.” Judge Avellano, the Benjamin of the judge-members, adds, “We have not voted on anything, be it a minor or major issue, without consulting the members.”

For her part, Committee Secretary Laura del Rosario shares that members would call her up even on weekends to discuss their assignments – evidence of their deep passion and commitment to their work of helping establish Family Courts. Judge Avellano confirms this, saying, “All the members are very passionate about the work. We work face-to-face and online. We work on weekdays, weekends, and holidays. Since we cannot convene every week [Editor’s Note: Judge Avellano even flies in for the CGRJ meetings from her station in San Carlos City, Negros Occidental], we maximize Viber, email, and SMS to get Committee work done.”

The CFCJC’s hard work has not gone unnoticed. Justice de Castro notes that as seen in the Summits it has held, the CFCJC has attracted support from various government agencies as well as aid agencies. This is also a testament to the importance of the work of Family Courts. Family Court Judge Quimpo-Sale speaks “of a profound sense of fulfillment in a job that enables us to render public service and, at the same time, directly contribute to creating a better, just, humane and non-violent society where our own children and grandchildren can exist peacefully.” Chief Justice Sereno for her part has said that the Family Courts’ core objective “is really to address the brokenness, the injuries in the soul of the Filipino family and in the child, the Filipino child.” In helping establish Family Courts, therefore, the CFCJC is also helping keep the Filipino family whole and the Filipino child safe.

1Speech delivered by Chief Justice Maria Lourdes P. A. Sereno during the National Summit on Family Courts on September 16, 2015 at the Crimson Hotel, Alabang, Muntinlupa City
2RA 8369, § 2
3RA 8369, § 3. In case where the city is the capital of the province, the Family Court shall be established in the municipality which has the highest population. (Id.)
6Memorandum Order No. 20-2014 dated August 13, 2014. Id.
7Id.
9Family Courts Comparative Budget Matrix for the Years 2016 and 2017. Figures provided by the SC Fiscal Management and Budget Office.
10Speech delivered by Chief Justice Maria Lourdes P. A. Sereno during the National Summit on Family Courts on September 16, 2015 at the Crimson Hotel, Alabang, Muntinlupa City.
By noon, most of us can’t wait for lunch or a stroll at the nearby mall. While others devour a hearty meal (some even with an extra cup or two of rice) or do some errands, a good number of our colleagues choose instead to dance and sweat it out to fast-paced music. Pass by the Court of Appeals auditorium come lunch time and you will hear loud and lively music, and see familiar faces in their gym clothes busting dance moves through what is famously called Zumba®.

First conceptualized in 2001, the Zumba® program is a Latin-inspired dance-fitness program which has grown to become the world’s largest—and most successful—dance-fitness program with more than 12 million people of all shapes, sizes, and ages taking weekly classes in over 110,000 locations across more than 125 countries. Zumba® is the combination of dance steps found in hip-hop, salsa, merengue, and mambo created by Colombian dancer Alberto Perez.

It was about five years ago when “Bong” taught Zumba® to the Court of Appeals employees. Today, his students also include Supreme Court employees, “marami na rin na taga-Supreme Court ang sumali [a lot of Supreme Court employees have also started to join my classes],” Bong has been teaching Aerodance and Tae Bo® for about 30 years, so when Zumba® became a thing, he didn’t hesitate to adapt the fitness exercise to his routines.

“Yang Zumba® parang Aerodance lang din yan, tinawag lang nila na Zumba® kasi bago, tapos Latin-inspired [Zumba® is the same as Aerodance, they just coined a different term for it because it is new and Latin-inspired],” says Bong. He shares, however, that his routine is a mixture of Zumba®, Aerodance, Tae Bo®, and Yoga. For his choice of music, he makes his own mix, a wide range from 70’s disco music to songs from One Direction.

According to Bong, his routine depends on his students’ mood, and he gives them choices before the start of every class. They can go from floor exercises like that in Yoga or dancing non-stop either with steps he will teach along the way or through a repetition of steps he will teach beforehand. He reveals that among the benefits of his fitness routines is the release of bad toxins from your body when you move around and dance.

Most of his students said that they would rather choose to spend their lunch break dancing around in Bong’s classes because they want to exercise in any way possible, especially since work in the Court is mostly sedentary, “at least nakakagalaw kami at pinagpapawisan [at least we sweat when we dance in his class],” one of his students shared. Another student shared that she prefers to participate in fitness classes during her lunch break so that she has more time to spend with her family after work. Others claim it’s a form of physical maintenance since they are not getting any younger.

Bong shared he had a few students who initially had a hard time having children, but soon after joining his dance classes, were blessed to get pregnant. Maybe it’s a miraculous coincidence, but these “Zumba® babies” as he fondly calls them, are among his proud success stories.

With the holidays fast-approaching and more gatherings in play, if you have spare time, it might actually be a good idea to join Bong’s classes during your lunch break to sweat a little and stretch those muscles if not to lose weight, maybe just to make you feel less guilty for the multiple servings of lechon you will inevitably eat. Or if you’re simply having a bad morning, maybe working up a good sweat can turn your day around. As the character Elle Woods from the film Legally Blonde aptly said: “Exercise gives you endorphins. Endorphins make you happy.”

For a reasonable fee, one can attend Bong’s classes held Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays at 12 noon and another at 5 p.m. at the CA auditorium.

(Formatter’s Note: Background information on Zumba were lifted from www.zumba.com and www.usatoday.com)
A lot of people have heard of various martial arts such as Korea’s tae kwon do and Japan’s judo and karate, Olympic sports all with karate making its maiden appearance in the Games in Tokyo in 2020. Yet sadly, not many people know, much less learned, the Philippines’ homegrown martial art, which is arnis.

Arnis, also known as escrima (eskrima) or kali, is a national sport of the Philippines. There are many versions of arnis’ provenance. According to blackbeltmag.com, arnis owes its development to the death of Ferdinand Magellan: “Chief Raja Lapu-Lapu killed Ferdinand Magellan with a kampilan dagger by slicing his leg, then thrusting the dagger into his throat.” In response to this, the Spaniards prohibited the Filipinos from using swords. However, this did not deter the Filipinos from merging their and the Spaniards’ sword skills by applying them to rattan sticks. Thus, arnis or escrima was born.

Arnis has also found its way to the Supreme Court. Thrice a week—on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, from 5-7 p.m.—the SC Security Division engages in arnis. After the Court employees have gone home, the Security personnel would change into their gear and assemble at the lobby of the SC New Building in Faura for their arnis training with their trainor. This has become a routine for over a year now.

Chief Judicial Staff Officer Joery Gayanan of the Security Division describes their training as the Philippine Martial Arts system since it does not merely focus on arnis alone. “It is the Filipino Martial Arts system, which is talagang pang-Pinoy,” he says. Besides the rattan stickes of arnis, they also train with the batuta, dulo dulo, and the kamagong stick. One of the benefits of arnis or the Philippine Martial Arts system is learning “close combat techniques,” which is its main purpose. According to Mr. Gayanan, it is about self-defense—using your empty hands.

Since the Security personnel are not advised to use guns, they find close combat techniques to be of great help in the the face of peril or threat. For instance, in the face of an attack involving a bladed weapon, one can “lock” the person’s arms to avoid getting injured or stabbed. Another technique one can do is parrying or bringing the person to the ground. It is a simple and practical self-defense strategy without the use of weapons.

Another benefit of practicing arnis is that it is good for the health, both physical and mental, as one engages in exercise at the same time releasing stress. With their knowledge of arnis, our Security personnel are able to protect not only the Court and its employees but their families and themselves as well.
good men. But it was he who, after a political defeat, spread the slander that I was responsible for Bonifacio’s death. They were both good men and we were friends. We were friends until politics destroyed our friendship….” Aguinaldo died 15 years later due to coronary thrombosis.

On June 11, 1971, former President Carlos P. Garcia was elected as President of the Constitutional Convention elected in 1970 to change the 1935 Constitution. Unfortunately, 74-year old Garcia died three days later of a heart attack and was succeeded by another former President, Diosdado P. Macapagal.

On June 11, 1978, President Ferdinand E. Marcos issued Presidential Decree No. 1486, creating the Sandiganbayan as a special court to attain the highest norms of official conduct required of public officers and employees” as provided for in Section 5, Article XIII of the 1973 Constitution. The Sandiganbayan was originally on the same level as the Courts of First Instance, which are now called the Regional Trial Courts. However, it was elevated to the level of the Court of Appeals when President Marcos issued P.D. No. 1606 on December 10 of the same year, revising P.D. No. 1486.

By virtue of Presidential Decree No. 1530, the Home Development Mutual Fund (HDMF) or the Pag-IBIG Fund, which stands for Pagtutulungan sa Kinabukasan: Ikaw, Bangko, Industria at Gobyerno, was established on June 11, 1978 to create a national savings scheme and give Filipino workers access to affordable housing financing. P.D. No. 1530 also appointed the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) to administer the funds of government employees and the Social Security System (SSS) to handle those of private employees.

On June 11, 1991, a tropical disturbance developed in East Samar which was eventually called Typhoon Yunya and locally named as Diding. Typhoon Diding struck southern Luzon on June 15, 1991, the same date of the massive final eruption of Mount Pinatubo. The water from Typhoon Diding’s heavy rains mixed with the ash deposits from Mount Pinatubo caused massive mudflows or lahars. 
