

MARIANITO O. ASPERILLA, M.D., F.A.C.P.

Citizen of the World

When the White House called the office of Dr. Marianito “Mark” O. Asperilla, his staff thought it was a prank – and hung up. After the third attempt, they realized it was no joke. President George W. Bush wanted to commend Dr. Asperilla, an infectious disease specialist practicing in Southwest Florida’s Charlotte County since 1989, for his efforts to combat bioterrorism – in person! This honor that few natural-born American citizens can claim was well-deserved by a doctor who has been publicly hailed as a “treasure” by a fellow physician, labeled a “Hometown Hero” by one area newspaper, recognized by another as one of the 100 most influential people in the community, and honored by Charlotte County government by declaring April 12, 2005, as official “Dr. Mark O. Asperilla Day.”



In 2007, the doctor was honored by being named Grand Marshal of the Punta Gorda Christmas Parade. In 2008, the doctor was included in the "Top 50 Power Players of Southwest Florida" by Gulfshore Business Magazine.

Dr. Asperilla attended medical school at the University of Santo Tomas. He completed his internship at Makati Medical Center in Manila before moving to the United States in the 1970s to complete residencies in internal medicine at Frankford Hospital, affiliated with the Medical College of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, and Atlantic City Medical Center in Atlantic City, N.J., where he was named associate chief resident.

Dr. Asperilla received his fellowship in infectious diseases at the Chicago Medical School and Albany Medical College of Union University in Albany, New York. He was an instructor and visiting professor in several teaching hospitals in New York and Florida. He has made presentations at national and international medical organization meetings, and published articles in a number of journals, and added his expertise to abstracts, editorials and textbooks.

When Dr. Asperilla sees a need in the community, he automatically responds. This has led to his founding numerous patient support organizations. Upon learning that Charlotte County had the highest rate of disability in the state, Dr. Asperilla founded Southwest Florida Disabilities in 1993, to which he has donated more than 2,500 volunteer hours.

A year later, he started the Charlotte County HIV Charity Clinic, which has provided more than \$2 million in free medical services to those suffering from HIV/AIDS. When that clinic was destroyed by Hurricane Charley in 2004, the doctor opened a trailer to serve these patients. Dr. Asperilla founded St. Vincent de Paul Pharmacy, the only freestanding charitable pharmacy in the state of Florida, thus far dispensing more than \$4 million in free medications to the poor. He also serves as medical director, and has rallied the support of 120 volunteers and 6 volunteer pharmacists to staff the facility. In addition, he was responsible for the pharmacy's expansion, opening four additional satellite branches in neighboring communities.

Due to the growing needs of the uninsured in Charlotte County, Dr. Asperilla opened the St. Vincent de Paul Charity Clinic, for which he serves as Medical Director. Through a partnership with Volunteers in Medicine, the clinic is staffed by about 30 volunteer physicians. Dr. Asperilla also donated a 1,000 square foot office facility for the clinic's use. He has also been able to raise at least \$1 million for a permanent clinic, and secured the land for this planned facility.

Florida Gov. Jeb Bush dubbed Dr. Asperilla a "Hurricane Hero" when presenting him with a state *Points of Light Award*. Although Hurricane Charley severely damaged both his home and his office, Dr. Asperilla immediately and selflessly began providing for the needs of other victims. He began an emergency prescription service, then battled red tape for months in order to make Charlotte County's FEMA trailer park the first FEMA park in the nation with a freestanding medical clinic, serving 1,500 homeless residents. He was also appointed fundraising director of the hurricane-damaged St. Charles Borromeo Roman Catholic Church, raising \$3.2 million for repairs, with he, himself, donating \$50,000.

In the aftermath of the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center, Dr.

Asperilla recognized the need for a concerted, unified response team to deal with the threat of bioterrorism. Involving health care professionals from various disciplines and area law enforcement and emergency management agencies, he created a multi-county bioterror response group, for which he received a special citation from the Florida Secretary of Health, as well as the Presidential Service Volunteer Award and personal visit from President George W. Bush in 2003. This was followed by former President George H. W. Bush presenting the doctor with one of two national Points of Light Awards he would receive for service to American society. Dr. Asperilla remains the Medical Coordinator for the Medical Reserve Corps serving Southwest Florida.

In 2006, Dr. Asperilla received two national honors from the American Medical Association – the Excellence in Medicine “Pride in Profession” Award and the AMA Foundation Leadership Award, which was highlighted in the nation’s newspaper USA Today. In addition, the doctor has received the Charlotte County Medical Society Service Award for three consecutive years, the Florida Medical Association President’s Humanitarian Award, Most Outstanding Alumnus of the Year 2004 by the University of Santo Tomas Medical Alumni Association and the Paco Catholic School Alumni Association, and Port Charlotte Rotary Club “Service Above Self” and Paul Harris Fellowship (humanitarian) awards, as well as being named “America’s Top Physician” by the Consumer Regional Council of America in 2003. In 2007, Dr. Asperilla received the Charles Donnegan Award for Volunteerism from the American College of Physicians.

The Charlotte County Chamber of Commerce honored him with its prestigious Pacesetter Award in 2006 – the same received the Man of the Year Award from the Cultural Center of Charlotte County.

A true “**citizen of the world**,” Dr. Asperilla co-founded ACCESS Care Inc. in 1994, a non-profit organization that sends teams of doctors to impoverished areas of Central and South America, treating to date more than 10,000 patients. Before that, in the 1980s, he headed numerous medical missions to the Philippines. He has also provided scholarships for needy students abroad and in the United States (one student, in the Philippines, was able to complete medical school through this program and another completed high school in PCS). After the 2004 Pacific typhoon, he provided medical supplies, scholarships and 30 new homes for people suffering in the Philippines through the Gawad Kalinga homeless program.

In turn, the charity named the village – located in Tower Ville, Bulacan – after Dr. Asperilla. He also served as President (2000-06) of the Filipino-American Society of Charlotte County, helping to promote cultural awareness and encourage community service, receiving that organization's Community Service Award in 2003. Dr. Asperilla is a shining example of compassion – and compassionate service – to both the United States and the Philippines.

Dr. Asperilla co-founded Tarpon Coast National Bank, which was sold in 2006 to Busey Bank, for which he sits on the Board of Directors and serves on the compensation committee.

He sits on the Human & Health Care Committee of the National Small Business Association of America based in Washington, D.C.

He recently opened an 86-room Microtel Inns & Suites hotel in Port Charlotte, with two more to follow in Lehigh Acres (to be completed in 2008) and near the Fort Myers Airport (to be completed in 2009).

Dr. Asperilla was a pioneer in having the largest commercial pommelo grove in Florida, growing 180 acres of fresh fruit. He opened the grove in 1992.

He is also bringing the Charlotte Harbor Queen, a 150-passenger paddlewheeler, which will provide tours around Charlotte Harbor.

He is president of Emerald Venture Realty, which owns numerous commercial properties around Charlotte County, as well as residential and duplex apartment complexes.

Dr. Asperilla could not join us today as he has a prior engagement. He has requested his brother and fellow Paconian, Lino Asperilla, to accept the award and deliver his acceptance speech.

