Infotech

7th BIRTHDAY OF THE NET IN RP

The day the country got hooked

By Jim Ayson

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(First of a series)

"WE'RE in."

These two words announced to a crowd
of conference participants gathered at
the University of San Carlos in
Talamban, Cebu, that a Philippine
network called Philnet had just
established a live connection to the
global Internet. It was 10:18 a.m. on
March 29, 1994, and a big cheer went
up from the crowd.

KELSEY and Richie

Today, it's hard to imagine life without e-mail. Without the World
Wide Web. Without URLs or domain names. Without spam, Flash,
MP3s and ICQ. No ISP bills, prepaid Net cards, or cable modems. No
ISPs. Just seven years ago, we didn't have these things. The Net is
something a lot of us take for granted today. And March 29 is the day
we commemorate its entry into the Philippines.

It wasn't an accident of nature. It took a resolute group of young,
idealistic people from the country's top universities and research
centers, working hard on Philnet, to bring it all together.

What surprises people used to today's megabucks-swilling dotcom
landscape is that Philnet wasn't underwritten by a major
telecommunications conglomerate eager to cash in. In the early '90s,
big

business or even the general public didn't care too much about the
Internet. It was mainly populated by nerd communities at universities

and research institutions and the occasional hacker underground. It had

its own rules and culture, which were intimidating to outsiders. But it also held the promise of access to a wealth of information available on tap, which made it particularly appealing to universities. The

Philippines was no exception.

Beginnings of e-mail

Richie Lozada, then a computer science instructor at Ateneo de Manila and now director for E-Commerce at Microsoft Philippines, recalls those early days, circa 1993.

"It started off as a small university-driven project. Back then, it was Ateneo, De La Salle and UP Diliman just trying to set up an e-mail network among ourselves."

Back then, e-mail was the biggest thing--and the only thing. No real-time chat, no Web services.

The universities linked up using a Unix dial-up mail protocol called UUCP. Generally, there were no problems sending mail, as long as the phone line was good.

"In those days, half the game was figuring out which telephone lines would work," Lozada recalls. "The telco infrastructure during those days wasn't exactly optimal."

Lozada was assigned to work on the project by Arnie del Rosario, head of the Ateneo's Computer center. Luis Sarmenta--who had achieved local notoriety as a student by writing some antivirus software--was initially working on the project but went off to MIT for his Ph. D., and Lozada took his place.

Over at De La Salle University (DLSU), Kelsey Hartigan-Go (now assistant vice president for IT at SM Prime Holdings) handled the unsavory task of interfacing with the Ateneans. DLSU had already established a campus-wide network as far back as 1989, and Hartigan-Go (who had experienced the real Internet as a grad student in the UK) had even established a workable facility for DLSU that could send mail to the Internet. As far back as 1991 he was dialing up to Joel Disini's (now CEO of DotPH Inc.) commercial e-mail service via the UUCP protocol and sending mail out through Disini's Applelink and UUnet gateways.

Rodel Atanacio and Rommel Feria at UP Diliman rounded up the group. Rodel and Rommel had already achieved some cyberspace fame by maintaining their Bulletin Board System, UP BBS, which was a

dial-up

information system for all things UP. These techies, together with other young computer jocks working at the Department of Science and Technology, formed the first version of the group that was to be known as the Philnet Technical Commitee, and were to play lead roles in wiring up the

universities to the Net.

Del Rosario brought the university e-mail project to the attention of Glenn Sipin of the DOST's Philippine Council for Advanced Science and Technology Research and Development group, who agreed to provide some funding. Sipin ponied up P60,000 and the inter-university project shifted to another level, now called Philnet phase one. The funding was used to improve the e-mail set up and incorporate something new: Sending e-mail to the real global Internet by dialing up to a gateway. Ateneo had relations with the Victoria University in Australia, which offered the use of its Internet gateway at no charge, provided the Philippine universities dialed up at their own expense.

The project worked. Students from all three universities could send e-mail to the Internet by routing messages through Philnet's gateway in Ateneo, which then connected to Australia, and then piped out the mail to the Internet. Incoming messages went back in through the same route. Because the system used IDD to connect to Australia, PLDT bills started to rack up, and the initial grant didn't last very long.

Still, the results were encouraging enough to make the DOST and Philnet consider taking the next step: Full Internet access. Enter Philnet Phase Two.

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Episode Two

The second phase of Philnet brought into the picture an entirely new personality. Dr. Rudy Villarica, a chemist by training, had gone through a colorful career that allowed him to merge an interest in science and engineering with business and industry. He had been involved in building plants and factories and at one point even served as the director of the DTI's Board of Investments (BOI). Now mainly retired, he spent much of his time with nonprofit foundations like the Industrial Research Foundation (IRF). It was while hew was with the IRF that an opportunity dropped into his lap to be the captain who would steer Philnet's course into a live Internet connection.

VILLARICA

Villarica remembers that events took place quite fast. He had joined the IRF as a trustee and in October 1993 was handed an assignment by the IRF executive director Cesar Santos who told him, "Rudy, this is right up your alley."

That assignment turned out to be Philnet. IRF was contacted by the DOST to handle the funds management and project implementation because while Philnet was a university consortium, it had no real legal identity to accept a grant of the magnitude that they were planning to request.

Also, the DOST had noticed elements of the age-old competition

between Ateneo and De La Salle brewing again and they wanted a neutral party to be in charge.

Villarica agreed to meet the Philnet technical team. Del Rosario and Sipin were excited about moving the project toward full Internet connectivity. At the meeting, they drew up a three-page project brief, with a "shopping list" of equipment and communication lines needed to make it a reality. Initially, Philnet estimated the project would cost about P8.5 million. Right after the meeting, Villarica went over the shopping list with Cesar Santos, and made some notes and corrected some of the figures in the proposal.

He told Santos he had a scheduled trip to the United States to visit one of his children enrolled in graduate studies at Syracuse University in New York. He was leaving the next day but would be back in a month and, in the meantime, maybe Santos could sum up the project cost and submit it to the DOST for funding.

"Cesar, *bahala ka muna dito*, (take care of things here while I'm away)" were Villarica's parting words.

In the first week of December 1994, Villarica returned from his trip and checked on Santos.

"Good news, Rudy," said Santos. "We have the project formally approved by the DOST with a memorandum of agreement. And you've been assigned as project administrator." Apparently, the DOST had approved the funding on Nov. 23.

"*Magkano ang budget na na-*approve? (How big a budget was approved?)" asked Villarica. The grant turned out to be P12.5 million for the first year. Villarica thought it was fair. But how should one proceed from there?

Immediately, Villarica set a personal goal for project completion. The Internet connection should be completed by April, he thought, a mere four months away. He didn't know if it was realistic, but it was as good a target date as any. And besides, he had already made a promise to Dr. John Brule.

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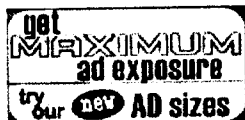
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Dr. Brule I presume?

Dr. John Brule was a Professor Emeritus in Electrical and Computer Engineering at Syracuse University in New York. About 30 years ago, he had been sent to the Philippines on a teaching assignment under a project of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization. A jolly, easy-going man, Brule and his wife easily fell in love with the warmth of Filipinos. He enjoyed the teaching experience so much, he later returned to the Philippines whenever he could, and taught pro bono at the University of San Carlos in Talamban, Cebu during his stays as a visiting professor. As the Internet unfolded in the late '80s, Brule was naturally excited to share the learning opportunities of the technology with Filipinos. Unfortunately, there were no local universities hooked up to the Net at the time. Then sometime in 1993, Brule got wind of Philnet.

Brule had an idea that a conference would be a good way to evangelize the learning potentials of the Internet to the Philippine academic community. He was sure he wanted it held in Cebu, having been convinced like many Cebuanos of the inequity of having to deal with "Imperial Manila" all the time. This time Cebu was going to take center stage. But a full fledged Internet conference would be impossible to demonstrate at the time since only e-mail was starting to be readily available in the Philippines at the time, either from Philnet, commercial e-mail providers, or amateur networks like FidoNet bulletin boards. So Brule decided to call the event "The First International E-Mail Conference."

Immediately, he spread the word on Filipino online communities like the STACnet mailing list and the Usenet newsgroup

soc.culture.filipino. He was also cooking up a batch of descriptions of the conference to send to Philnet's Del Rosario of. In October 1993, while at Syracuse, he casually bumped into his old friend, Dr. Villarica, visiting one of his sons taking graduate courses in the university.

Brule and Villarica had first met back in 1987. Villarica's son Marty had just been accepted for graduate studies in engineering at Syracuse.

Villarica accompanied his son to look around and eventually was introduced to Brule. When Brule mentioned he was often in Cebu to teach at the University of San Carlos, a common chord was struck as Rudy Villarica and wife Pilar are Cebuanos and they knew some of the people Brule mentioned. Pretty soon they got to know each other quite well, and would visit each other's homes when in town.

Villarica casually mentioned to Brule that he had been placed in charge of Philnet, and the plan was to get a live Internet connection going.

Brule couldn't believe his luck.

"Wonderful! How soon can you get the Internet link-up?" he asked.

Brule had scheduled the E-Mail conference for March 27 to 30, 1994 and had already invited some Net-savvy overseas Filipinos he met through STACnet to participate as speakers.

"Do you think you can arrange for a live link-up at the conference?"

Villarica mulled over the question a bit.

"Well John, it's going to be a close call," he answered.

But eventually Villarica promised Brule he could get the connection up by that date and the first live connection would coincide with Brule's conference. Privately, Villarica wondered if he could meet the promised deadline, which was only four months away. But he was certainly going to try.

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Telcos and Ciscos

With Dr. Villarica back in Manila by the first week of December 1993, work moved fast on the shopping list prepared by the Philnet technical committee. The first order of business was to get the leased lines from the telcos. Philnet would be needing an international private line or IPL to connect from Philnet's router to the Internet provider selected in the US--Sprint Communications. They would also need leased lines for all the universities involved to connect to Philnet.

By this time, the Philnet project had expanded outside Metro Manila schools to include UP Los Baños in Laguna, St. Louis University in Baguio, Univerity of San Carlos in Cebu and Xavier University in Cagayan

de Oro. New points in Metro Manila included DOST-Advanced Science and Technology Institute in UP Diliman and the University of Santo Tomas.

Villarica lined up meetings with five of the top leased line providers.

Invariably they would be asked: "By the way, do you have the money for this?" He always managed to quickly answer: "No, but the project has been approved by the DOST, so the money is on it's way, don't worry."

Eventually the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT) was selected since it gave the best price. A 64-Kbps IPL for $10,000 per month and local leased lines for all the nodes for P130,000 per month.

Villarica recalls that Philnet tried to get special terms from PLDT in light of the academic nature of the project and the DOST backing. But PLDT was in no mood to give Philnet any special discounts, even after meeting with then company president Antonio "Tony Boy" Cojuangco.

Cojuangco also had some inkling about what effect the Internet was going to have on his business.

"This is going to affect the telephone companies," he told Philnet. But in the end, business was business, and PLDT became the carrier for Philnet.

Also on the shopping list were routers, which would connect the university networks to the leased lines. The technical committee had been recommending Cisco routers for their robustness and Villarica had some

meetings with Willy Gan. Gan's company ComNet was an authorized reseller of Cisco. After a discussion on router models, Philnet settled on the top-of-the-line Cisco 7000 as the main router used to connect to the

IPL, and a Cisco 2501 for each university node. This equipment didn't come cheap, as the 7000 series was running at $70,000 and each Cisco 2501 went for $30,000.

Selling the project

With all the costs involved in setting up and operating Philnet, Villarica could see the original grant wouldn't last long. So Philnet had to have a viable business plan, and operate on a cost-recovery

model.

Since Philnet was an academic network, the primary clients were universities who were referred to as members. But each educational member involved was going to have pay to participate. There was no such

thing as a free lunch. Each Internet connection was going to cost them P30,000 per month.

"That was a hard sell," Villarica recalls. "They complained: 'Where are we going to get that kind of money?' But we told them: 'If you want to be the first, you'll have to ante up.'"

Eventually, Philnet gave the schools a grace period of three to four months of free access. After having tasted what the Internet was like,

they were off and running.

Educational partners weren't going to pay all the bills however, and Philnet had to consider providing bandwidth to other groups as well. The first ones considered were international organizations based in the

Philippines like the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), and later on, the Asian Institute of Management (AIM). These groups were called "preferred members" and were offered an Internet connection at the rate of $3,000 a month.

Mike Hawkins, a data communications specialist at ADB, was an especially tough sell. Villarica recalls at one of the first meetings that he was worried about Philnet being merely "a network run by amateurs,"

referring to the youth and relative inexperience of the Philnet technical committee. It wasn't until Philnet had finally gone online that Mike changed his tune.

"Mike started to call me up," he remembers. "Before that it was: 'Don't call us, we'll call you.' Now it was 'Count us in.'"

Another significant client was ComNet, the vendor supplying the Cisco routers. Gan, ComNet's president, himself saw the commercial potential of Internet access and signed up as a preferred member. This would lead to the formation of Mosaic Communications or MosCom, the first full-access commercial Internet service provider in the country.

Villarica never fails to emphasize the importance of the commercial clients.

"Without the preferred members, we could not have lasted even one year. The money would have dried up. But because of that we were able to keep Philnet rolling."

(To be concluded tomorrow)

Jim Ayson is a pioneer in chronicling information technology and cyberspace, having written articles about the Internet in local publications as far back as March 1994, the same month the Internet was born in the Philippines. Prior to that, he was already writing about computers in local trade magazines. Jim is also the moving force behind PhilMusic.com. An archive of his written works about cyberspace can be found on the Web at http://www.bbs.org.ph/history/jra.html.

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SOMETIME during the first week of March, Dr. Rudy Villarica and members of the Philnet Technical Committee (Arnie del Rosario, Richie Lozada, and Kelsey Hartigan Go) sat down for a meeting at Club Filipino in San Juan with Joel Disini. Then, as now, Disini was the administrator of the top-level domain (TLD) for the Republic of the Philippines, .PH (pronounced "dot PH").

In 1989, Disini obtained an appointment from the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) to act as the .PH domain administrator. IANA was in the process of creating the first country-code TLDs and was handing them over for free on a first come, first serve basis to individuals who applied who could prove they were technically competent. Of course, in 1989, there was hardly any interest in the Internet in the Philippines.

Philnet believed the .PH domain should be handled not by an individual, but by a foundation that was promoting the use of the Internet in the country. Besides, being backed by the Department of Science and Technology, they believed they had the authority of the Philippine government on the matter.

Villarica recalls the Club Filipino meeting: "We wanted him to turn over the administration of .PH to us. Philnet wanted to be a single point of contact for connecting to the Internet. We brought it up. We asked him to give it to us. Kelsey, Richie, Arnie were saying that the .PH domain should really belong to Philnet because we were going to provide the first full Internet access in the Philippines. Secondly, it's a foundation. And at the time there was really no money in the Internet or in domain registration. It was all free at the time and administrators were unpaid volunteers."

But it wasn't meant to be. According to Villarica, Disini's reaction was to ask, "What do I get in return?" He claimed he had invested about

P50, 000 to P60, 000 in trips to the US and other related expenses. Disini also said he would consider if he got direct leased-line access to Philnet. Villarica balked. "It would have jeopardized the setup," he recalls. "Giving him the leased line for free would put him on the level of the preferred partners."

Hartigan Go recalls that it was a "very heated discussion." The talks continued virtually after the Club Filipino meeting, eventually spilling over to technical Filipino mailing lists like STACnet. In the meantime, the inability of Philnet to issue .EDU.PH domains for the universities was becoming a very real problem. If Philnet went online, e-mail addresses of the universities would need numerical Internet protocol addresses at the end instead of meaningful domains. With no .PH domain, Philnet registered the domain Philnet.net with the US-based InterNIC as a contingency measure.

After a couple of board meetings, Villarica returned to Disini with an offer to reimburse him for all his expenses while administering the .PH domain, but said that Philnet could not give him free leased-line access. Disini refused. Villarica tried to appeal to his patriotism, also to no avail. "That might have been the wrong approach," he later mused.

Then Villarica tried the back door to get control of the domain. Philnet had an early supporter in the person of Dr. Steven Goldstein of the US National Science Foundation (NSF). At the time, the NSF managed much of the Internet infrastructure. Goldstein worked as a tireless evangelist of the Internet worldwide, helping various countries get their infrastructure started. He once paid a visit to Philnet in 1993 upon the DOST's request, to see if he could assist in the project.

"He was supposed to come here and teach us how to do these things," recalled Villarica. "But when he arrived, everything was already *plantsado* (complete) and he was surprised."

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AFTER TALKS with Disini bogged down, Villarica contacted Goldstein and asked him to assist in lobbying with IANA to reassign the .PH domain to Philnet. His e-mail went:

"Our talks with J. E. Disini, present administrator for the PH domain name have ended abruptly due to his intransigence in turning over the name to PHilnet. He is demanding compensation for 'turning over' the adminstratorship to us.

"In view of your vast knowledge of Internet, could you please enlighten me as to how we could obtain the PH domain name for Philnet since our foundation has been mandated and supported by the Department of Science and Technology to set up the country-wide network for R&D and educational purposes primarily?"

Goldstein did what he could behind the scenes, but was unsuccessful. At the time, IANA placed more authority on technically savvy individuals than on governments in Internet matters. They also wanted to stay away from foreign politics and infighting, preferring that the parties work it out internally. After consulting with colleagues at the NSF, he replied in an e-mail dated March 23, 1994:

"My colleagues and I have spent much time during the past week discussing via e-mail the various sides of the "problem" which you allude to. We have also had direct communications from Joel Disini. Mr. Disini states categorically that he will delegate a complete and appropriate subdomain(s) such as gov.ph or edu.ph to Philnet*immediately* and with no charges."

Goldstein also noted:

"As long as Mr. Disini discharges his responsibilities properly, there are no grounds for 'impeaching' him. From what he has written to the

Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA), it appears that he is quite ready to assign you an appropriate subdomain *instantaneously*. This will be the fastest route to getting Philnet 'on the air,' and I ask you to give it serious consideration."

Philnet would have pursued the matter further but Villarica also received around this time, a rather nasty hate mail from Randy Bush, a high-ranking pillar of the Internet community. Apparently appraised of Disini's situation, he "flamed" Villarica and the Filipino people using very strong language. That was the time Villarica and Philnet decided to drop the matter altogether. It wasn't worth the aggravation.

Despite Disini's letter to IANA, Philnet continued to wait for the .EDU.PH and .GOV.PH domains to be turned over. Philnet had to follow them up. "It took us over a month and a half to get them working at the universities," recalled Hartigan Go.

Off to Cebu

As the end of March 1994 drew near, preparations for Dr. John Brule's "First International E-Mail Conference" at the University of San Carlos (USC) in Talamban, Cebu went into high gear. It was billed as a three-day conference, from March 27 to 29. Prior to the conference, Brule had been burning up the e-mail lines sending information about the conference using Philnet's early dial up connections. USC also had an alternate dialup e-mail connection via the NEC offices in Cebu, which had a dialup linkup via Japan. There were also Fidonet BBS networks in Cebu that provided e-mail accounts to the public for a small annual fee.

Over at the STACnet mailing list, enthusiasm for the conference ran high. STACnet was an e-mail list composed of Filipino expatriates in technical fields, running off a server in a research institute in Sweden. It was started off by the Department of Foreign Affairs and centered on discussions about how overseas Filipinos could give something back to the Philippines. The E-Mail Conference in Cebu held the promise of having them "show off" Internet applications to their *kababayan* (countrymen), and a number of members from the US and Europe made plans to attend or give talks in Cebu.

Invitations were sent to the Philnet technical committee, academics and students, prominent local cyberspace netizens, and even the early professional e-mail providers. It was suddenly "the" event of the early Philippine cyberspace community. Roberto "Obet" Verzola of the E-Mail Center, an e-mail company that catered to the nongovernment organization community, came down to give a presentation. Even Disini, who ran an e-mail service of his own, was sent an invitation, but he decided not to go.

This author also received an invitation. I was there to co-present the

status of the Philippine FidoNet BBS network (a nationwide network of interconnected bulletin board systems) along with Jojo Sybico, who ran the Cebu leg of the network. Even in 1994, Cebu had an active cyberspace scene going. Sybico's organization was called C.E.B.U. (Computer Enthusiasts and BBS Users) and they were tasked to set up dial up e-mail facilities for conference participants.

Bombim Cadiz (now the president of PHnet) was there representing Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro. He had just received his M.S. in Computer Science at Virginia Tech, and had returned to the Philippines to teach at Xavier. Just a few days after arriving, Bombim was on a boat to Cebu to attend the conference. He remembers that at first glance, the conference proceedings were rather ho-hum and unimpressive.

"It was probably because I had just returned from the U.S. with an MS in Computer Science and thought that I already knew what everyone was talking about," he recalled. "I found it funny that they setup an entire conference around the E-mail concept when what I wanted to show everyone was the power of the Internet."

Even Jojo Sybico was unimpressed with the proceedings. "Personally I found the whole thing a bit geeky," he said with tongue-in-cheek humor.

But Cadiz recalls being impressed with the Philnet technical team. "I thought that the group of Admu (Ateneo de Manila University), DLSU (De La Salle University), UPD (University of the Philippines Diliman), UPLB (UP Los Baños) and others were closely knit and were really working together to bring everything up. Then, I was still an outsider, not knowing anyone. I was impressed by their enthusiasm and camaraderie." Later on, Bombim Cadiz would rise to head the PHnet foundation, which grew out of the Philnet project.

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THE PHILNET technical committee definitely had no problem with their trip. Being such energetic young men, they spent most of their evenings after the conference sampling the vibrant Cebu nightlife.

Despite the staid conference proceedings, there was unmistakable electricity in the air. Brule and Villarica had announced that Philnet Internet link might go live during the conference, and everyone wanted to be around when it happened. Prior to the conference, Ateneo's Richie Lozada had planed in earlier hand carrying a Cisco 4000 router to be attached to a leased line connection provided to USC by the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT) in time for the conference. The USC router would connect to Philnet's main Cisco 7000 router at PLDT in Makati. Everything in Cebu was primed and ready. But when the connection was exactly going to happen though, was anyone's guess.

PLDT had been doing tests on the leased line to the US for several days before the connection to US Internet provider Sprintlink could be activated. ComNet head techie Benjie Tan was assigned to activate the main router in Manila. During the conference, Villarica was getting anxious. He made regular calls to ComNet's office in Makati to follow up the connection.

Then on the evening of March 28, Benjie Tan got the word that the line was ready. He flew in straight from a training trip in Hong Kong to setup the main Cisco 7000 router at PLDT's network center at the Ramon Cojuangco Building in Makati and activate the link to Sprint.

At 1:15 am on March 29, Tan established a live Internet connection between the Philnet network and Sprint. Soon afterwards, he posted the following message on the Usenet newsgroup soc.culture.filipino:

Subject: The Philippines is in!

Date: 28 Mar 1994 18:03:58

As of March 29, 1994 at 1:15am, RP time (unfortunately two days late due to technical difficulties), the Philippines was FINALLY connected to the Internet via SprintLink. The Philippine
router, a CISCO 7000 router was attached via the services of PLDT and Sprint Comm to SprintLink's router at Stockton, CA. The gateway to the world for the Philippines will be via the NASA Ames Research Center. For now, a 64K serial link is the information highway to the rest of the Internet world.

At 5:30 am, Tan called up Dr. Villarica in Cebu, rousing him from his slumber. "Sir, it's all done," he said. "That's great! Great!" Villarica exclaimed.

Villarica put the word out to the Philnet technical committee that the connection just went live in Manila. They were to assemble at USC early morning to activate the connection to the main router at PLDT in order to get the live Internet link going in time for the presentations that day. The conference was drawing to a close, and it needed to end with a bang.

Richie Lozada recalls having slept in late due to hard night of partying. The team actually expected the connection to happen at a later time. They groggily woke up to the news that the link in Manila went live. "My first objective - since I came in a bit later than the rest--was to rush to San Carlos and look for an access terminal to log into the Cisco 4000. Back then you couldn't just carry notebooks--you had to rely on workstations actually connected."

Lozada logged in through a terminal located at the main auditorium at USC where seminar proceedings were going on. The router needed to be readjusted to divert the connection from the campus local area network to the main Philnet router at PLDT. Then he had to adjust the presentation computer that was hooked up to the projector so that it could access the Internet. It was a rush job, and he was configuring settings even as people started to stream into the auditorium.

When Lozada had finished, Dr. John Brule was about to commence a demonstration of live chat. Lozada informed him the connection was up. Brule nodded. He executed the chat commands to chat with his son Mark over at Syracuse. He connected. "We're in," he announced. A cheer went up from the audience. It was 10:18 am, March 29, 1994.

Lozada recalls an announcement went out, possibly by Dr. Villarica. "This is not a dial-up connection. This is the real thing. Our link to the Internet is finally live." People were applauding like crazy. People were thinking, finally the Internet is here, and we had live connectivity to the outside world.

Aftermath

When the Philnet technical committee got home after the conference, there was an immediate flurry of activity. At the Ateneo de Manila, Linux enthusiast Dr. Pablo Manalastas began doing what he had been waiting for weeks. He proceeded to download an entire Linux distribution from Finland. With very little activity on the new network, this went by pretty fast.

Others were swamped with requests for information. "I was answering something like 15 calls an hour from all over," recalled Hartigan Go at DLSU. "Trying to explain what Internet is, what you need to connect, why it was expensive, from people who didn't know a monitor from a keyboard, to techies who think they know everything but had to ask anyway. That went on for a few months."

"I also had to answer a lot of e-mail queries from everywhere," he added. "Such as what's the plan for Philnet, how soon will it be nationwide, when will it reach Tugeugarao, or Davao, how to connect this school and that... how to bring Usenet and Stacnet to the rest of the Philnet community. Everybody was ecstatic, and they wanted so many things."

It was a more innocent time, before the commercialization of the Internet as we know it today. And there was a drive to share a special kind of knowledge with everyone.

Cadiz mused about that period: "I do get nostalgic about the camaraderie shown by everyone who was involved in the Internet evangelization and the pioneering spirit. Most of all, I just find it satisfying that PHNET was able to help get the Internet into the Philippines and find all the difficulties worth it."

Lozada summed it up. "It was a pretty exciting time to be in."

Jim Ayson is a pioneer in chronicling information technology and cyberspace, having written articles about the Internet in local publications as far back as March 1994, the same month the Internet was

born in the Philippines. Prior to that, he was already writing about computers in local trade magazines. Jim is also the moving force behind PhilMusic.com. An archive of his written works about cyberspace can be found on the Web at http://www.bbs.org.ph/history/jra.html.