

MBC President's Report for the year 2025

2025 commenced with a cloud of uncertainty regarding Jovie and how we would replace her. Jovie had declared before Christmas that she intended to return to the province to look after her grandmother early in the year but by the end of Christmas this had changed to later in the year. This was brought to a head quite early in the year when she blatantly ignored the instructions of the board not to permit entry to the club of a certain undesirable person. This was compounded with money going missing yet again. Luckily, Jovie offered the wife of a cousin of hers the opportunity to stay at the club in return for helping out. So, Dolly Moda Bacus, her husband Eugene and her son Gheo appeared. Dolly has turned out to be a conscientious, trustworthy and hard worker and basically did most of Jovie's work. We finally had to inform Jovie that her presence was no longer acceptable as the Board had lost trust in her, and she decided to return to the province with her girlfriend. This finally happened at the beginning of October after a few false starts. Dolly has been a pleasure to work with knowing that we now have a conscientious hard-working person always on hand to help and Eugene lends a supporting hand when needed. Hopefully this relationship will continue to grow.

We have had 2 public events this year, namely the annual regatta and World Rivers Day. Both were well attended and should be covered in the Boat Captain's report, so I shall not duplicate except to say a BIG thank you to my fellow director, Kris Ablan for spear-heading these successful events. We shall now try to hold 2 regattas per year and possibly invite the Royal Hong Kong Rowing Club (and others) to participate as they are always keen.

I was invited to talk at the University of the Philippines, Diliman in the early part of the year and it was good to be amongst luminaries who had a passion for the river and did not want to see the construction of a six-lane highway along it. To date we have heard no more about this project but remain suspicious that interested parties will be continuing to push it behind the scenes. We shall stay vigilant as this would make rowing very difficult and probably dangerous, given the potential narrowing of the river and the quantity of obstructions rowers would face.

Thanks to the initiative of our relatively new member Chris Skuse, we negotiated with the Philippine Rowing Assoc. for the loan of a further 4 boats, 3 singles and a double. Mind you it took the best part of the year. We now have a good-sized fleet and in order to make space in the boat shed, will be finding homes for some of the old wooden boats that will really never be used again. So, if anyone wants a nice (albeit large) decoration, let me know and we can strike a deal. By the time you attend the AGM (hopefully?) I should have converted one of the old singles to a hanging light to be placed on the balcony to replace the rather old and sad hanging light there now.

We have had a little trouble with the Philippine Coastguard who have tried to impose restrictions on us, but we are working through those. Mostly concerned with safety, which are hard to refute, but importantly the practicality of adhering to those rules in a rowing shell is sometimes overlooked. The, in my opinion, unthought out strengthening of the Makati/Mandaluyong bridge has caused a dangerous constriction of the river making passing through hazardous in times of river levels being high, for not only our rowing boats, but even the tugboats. Our pontoon continues to suffer at the hands of inconsiderate boat drivers; I hesitate to call them 'captains' as I doubt many have had any proper maritime training on the handling of water craft. The attitude is more akin to that of a jeepney driver in my view! But we persevere and PCG are also trying to get them, and the fishing boats, to control their speed (and wakes).

The conversion of the Squash Courts has continued apace, and Court 2 is now almost functional for Pickle Ball, Basketball and Tennis training. I hope that 2026 will see an emergence of great usage of that Court. In fact, we have been approached by the Philippine Lacrosse Association to enter into an agreement for them to use court 2 for training. The completes the court conversions project and I would like to thank RAdm Larry and Quintin for their tremendous support in driving this through. We

continue to address the problem of leaks in the roof which I fear will be ongoing until the whole roof is replaced. The Club spent a great deal of money on fixing leaks in December which would not have been possible without the help of donations from some generous members. Next project is to create a cigar & whisky lounge in front of the office. There is clearly a lack of convivial spaces in Manila where cigars can be smoked, and the Board feels that a traditional style facility would be well supported and could even warrant a separate membership category. Leather Chesterfields, air conditioning and a library are proposed together with an internet connected business desk.

We have had a good clear-out of the boatshed which is looking much tidier than I ever remember it. The re-homing of some boats will make completion of this easier. The gardens have also had a good trim this year and Dolly's maintenance has given the place a much fresher, cleaner look.

We have been approached by Dr Marti Magsanoc of Archivo Publications to re-publish (in hard back) Manila Rows (the history of MBC) and bring it up to date a bit. The Board has approved this and hopefully the book will be available by the 2nd qtr. of 2026. Members will be informed as soon as it can be ordered.

The Ayala Foundation and ADB approached MBC to use the premises for a presentation of their new project to clean the river. So, on November 25th the Clearbot, an AI driven, autonomous trash and water lily collector was demonstrated from the MBC dock. This was well attended by Makati City officials and also Fernando Zobel de Ayala. There was considerable press coverage which was good publicity for MBC.

The Annual Kids Xmas Party was held on November 29th and again we had 125 children plus their parent/guardian. A joint effort with the 126th Squadron PCGA, it was as usual a fun and entertaining event, followed by a joint MBC/126th Christmas Party afterwards which went on late into the night. It has been proposed by a member that we might consider changing from a Christmas party to an Easter egg Hunt. The new Board will take this under consideration. It would certainly be quite novel for the club.

We had 2 members put their hands up to join the Board this year – Chris Skuse and Clarisse Evangelista. Chris has an extraordinary knowledge of the technicalities of rowing and has been a great help in training members and maintaining the fleet. Chris also was instrumental in persuading PRA to loan us a further 4 boats, mainly through his generous donation of sorely needed spares to PRA. Mind you that process probably caused him a few sleepless nights, but we got there in the end with some good old-fashioned diplomacy to smooth the way. Clarisse being a lawyer can bring some solid legal advice to add to that of Kris Ablan, should we need it and she has already been helpful in supervising the drafting of an MOA with PRA for the loan of the boats.

We have also been approached by the University of the Philippines Dragonboat Team (UPDT) who will come and discuss a possible relationship with us in January. An interesting idea that could help increase the membership and income for the Club as well as easily allow existing members to try paddling if they wish. We shall meet with them in February to explore the possibilities.

In closing, I wish to express my appreciation and gratitude to all the members for their continued and continuing support to the various club activities, (but we do need more attendance), to all our Club volunteers, without whose time and energy the Club would have been unable to service our general membership and lastly to my fellow Board members whose devotion and dedication to the Club are beyond quantification. 2026 has seen tremendous improvements to the Club which would not have been possible without the very generous support of Quintin Pastrana, RADM Larry Dimagiba and Gimo Gomez – thank you. Thank you also to those of you (and in particular Atty. Kris Ablan, ASEC DTI) who strive to promote MBC and in particular make the public aware of the importance of the Ilog Pasig to Metro Manila. For my part, it was a pleasure and an honor to have

performed my role in serving the Club during this year that passed. I believe that 2026 will be an even better year for MBC.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Stratton', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

James Stratton
President
Jan 13th, 2025