

# COUNTY LIFE

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## *Pioneering yo-yo father honored with documentary*

**J**ust about anyone who grew up in America in the past 80 years has played with a Duncan yo-yo. But if you ask Georgetown resident JoAnn Radovan (some may remember her as teacher JoAnn Brown), she'll tell you about her father's company, Royal Tops Manufacturing Company, and what it was like to grow up with cartons of wooden yo-yos stacked in the halls of her family home.

"My dad Joe owned a yo-yo factory in Astoria, Queens, back in the 1930s," said Ms. Radovan. "He was in business through the 1970s in the same spot. We lived in a flat above the factory. My brother and I would sometimes wander in after hours and play with the strings or make our own yo-yos."

Ms. Radovan, who's lived in Georgetown since 1980, taught fifth grade at Williams Elementary before becoming a Realtor in 1993.

Los Angeles documentary filmmaker Cynthia Liu is working on a feature-length movie about Ms. Radovan's father, which is due out late next year. The two women will give a free presentation to the public, followed by an opportunity for questions on Wednesday, October 4, from 7 to 9:30 p.m. in the Avaya Auditorium at the University of Texas at Austin.

The event is designed to be part of Austin's nod to Filipino American History Month (October) and the Centennial Commemoration of Filipino Immigration to Hawaii (1906-2006). Mr. Radovan, who died in 1989, moved to the U.S. in 1930. In January, Ms. Radovan will travel with Ms. Liu to her father's hometown in the Philippines to finish filming for the movie.

Ms. Liu's documentary spotlights Filipino American "yo-yo men"—entrepreneurs like Ms. Radovan's father and the acknowledged great-grandfather of yo-yoing in America, Pedro Flores.

"It's really an amazing piece of American history that's been obscured by the Duncan legend," says Ms. Liu. "In fact, Royal was one of Duncan's biggest competitors."

In 1928, two to three years before Duncan came along, Pedro Flores started Flores Yo-Yo Corporation to launch a toy he'd played with as a child in the Philippines, said Ms. Liu.

**When Donald E. Duncan Sr. saw the stir that yo-yos made, he bought out Mr. Flores's company.**

Mr. Duncan, a marketing genius, proceeded to amplify upon the system of traveling yo-yo demonstrators, contests and prizes (sweater patches, bicycles, and later, televisions) that Mr. Flores began.

"Duncan had 'yo-yo men,' most of them Filipino immigrants like Flores and Radovan, criss-crossing the country and running contests in candy stores, five-and-dimes, and movie theatres," said Ms. Liu. "Every generation since the Depression and after has fallen in love with it. But Duncan wouldn't have had a business if it weren't for the flair and salesmanship of Filipino demonstrators, some of whom broke away from Duncan and started their own companies."

Ms. Radovan said her father went to Brazil, England, France and Cuba to promote the yo-yo for Duncan, traveling on luxury oceanliners and staying in swanky hotels.

"He saw a lot of the world — not bad for a small-town kid from the Philippines! And business for his own company Royal Tops took him all over America, including every little small town and anyplace there was a kid who'd buy a yo-yo."

Americans remember Duncan thanks to the intense media blitz in newspapers and TV ads over 35 years or so, said Ms. Liu, and the Filipino yo-yo demonstrators were part of the appeal of the toy.

"Plus, Duncan yo-yos are still around in one form or another . . . so, why are Flores and Radovan forgotten, but Duncan remembered? That's part of the story we tell in the documentary," she said.

Professor Kim Alidio, professor of history, an expert in Filipino American history, and part of the Center for Asian American Studies at UT-Austin, will provide commentary.

The event is sponsored by The Center for Asian American Studies, UT-Austin. Parking is available for \$3 at San Jacinto Garage on campus, a 10-minute walk to the ACES Building, East Mal, or at metered street parking.



Georgetown resident JoAnn Radovan is helping create a film about her father, Joe Radovan, a Filipino American "yo-yo man." Mr. Radovan, who could operate four yo-yos at once, manufactured this ProYo III, which is no longer in production.

Patric Schneider