T’boli family turns traditional ‘t’nalak’ weaving into a variety of products
Posted at 1:57 pm October 21, 2010
By Alexander Villafania

GEN. SANTOS CITY, SOUTH COTABATO - Coming from a proud people that have preserved their culture for centuries, Gida Ofong is hoping to pass on her native T’boli culture not just to her two daughters but also to a much wider audience.

In particular, Gida (whose Christian name is Florita de la Cruz) is promoting t’nalak, a unique woven fabric made by the women of the T’boli tribe of Lake Sebu in Southern Mindanao. It is touted for its durability using abaca fibers as primary material.

The t’nalak is given color using natural dyes from a variety of fruits and trees. These are woven using a weaving method that is said to be hundred years old. This video shows how the t’nalak is woven.

T’nalak patterns are said to be inspired by the dreams of T’boli women, who are referred to as “dream weavers”.

The complex but symmetrical designs indicate the dreams of the weaver. Variations are made depending on the weaver’s dreams and these are often passed on from parent to child, mother to daughter.

Traditionally, the t’nalak is worn as a traditional garment and often comes with hand-made accessories such as brass beads, necklaces, and earrings.

Gida, who owns Gida’s T’nalak, has expanded her market line by turning the fabric into fashion accessories, from bags, purses, shoes, and hats. Her inspiration to put t’nalak into usable accessories is largely borne out of the curiosity by her customers who ask where they could put t’nalak.
“I was always asked by people about the usability of t’nalak in other products so we incorporated the fabric into value-added products,” Gida said.

According to Gida, the t’nalak’s market success initially came from an international market, when exporters found her material during a previous Furnishing and Apparel Market Exchange (FAME) exhibit in Manila. Since then, she has been hoping to expand her line to the domestic market.

“It’s quite a challenge to get the market to be attuned to this product but we do hope that other Filipinos will accept t’nalak as a multi-purpose fabric,” Gida said.

So far, Gida has tapped the skills of at least 550 T’boli women. She is also training younger generation of women from her tribe to continue with the tradition.

“It’s our responsibility to preserve this cultural activity,” Gida said.


Look more on www.aboutphilippines.ph