

On My Mind
by Ruth L. Tighe

The increase in the number of military ships coming to Saipan brings with it new opportunities for enterprising entrepreneurs. Already rental car and motorcycle businesses appear to be profiting from the arrival of the ships, and no doubt restaurants and fast food eateries are as well.

So far as I know, the ships' crew members have to go to where the vendors are - but what about having the vendors go to where the ships' crews are? No, I am not advocating that "hustlers" with cheap goods line up at the Port to pester crew members as they come ashore - as is done on the streets of Kuta in Bali, and elsewhere.

But that doesn't mean that vendors couldn't set up booths along the dock. Car and motorcycle rental could be offered "on site." Individual artists, or the Arts Council, could set up booths selling island artifacts, photographs, tape recordings, and mawr-mawrs. Food vendors could set up tents, and offer island foods like sashimi, red rice, kelaguan, pancit, barbecued chicken, snacks. The bookstore could offer island history books, guides, maps. Island tour guides could offer their services.

Of course, crew members can go around the island and try to find such things on their own, but dockside booths would be a convenience, particularly to those crew members assigned to stay on the ship. Presumably, those still on the ship would be free to leave it long enough to at least shop dockside.

There aren't yet enough ships coming in to set up permanent facilities like those at tourist dock areas in Tahiti and Caribbean ports, where all sorts of boutique-like shops are within easy walking distance of the cruise ships that visit on a regular basis. But one could set up tents, or even pala-palas each time a ship came in to the Tanapag dock.

Of course, it would take some planning and coordination to do it right. The Ports Authority would have to provide advance notice of ship arrivals. Criteria would have to be established for the number and nature of vendor booths that would be allowed. A rotating list of approved vendors could be established, so that each would get a turn at selling to the ships that docked, rather than giving out exclusive licenses to only a few. The respective roles of the Ports Authority, the Chamber of Commerce, the Visitors' Authority would have to be determined. The scope of activities could be broadened, to include cruise ships as well as the military ships.

At the moment, there isn't much for crew members, cruise passengers, to look at when they first get to port. A colorful array of booths, tents, or pala palas would make a much better impression. And bring additional jobs and income not only to local residents but also to the government.

Maybe Teno should appoint another task force?

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Speaking of the military presence, I can't help but comment on the temporary absence, this past week, of the military pre-positioning ships on our horizon. I'm not sure what it meant in terms of military strategy - were the ships off to some new trouble spot in the Pacific? But leaving the horizon clear and open - vast and empty - restored for me - however briefly - one of the great charms of living on an island, within sight of the sea: the sense that there are no limits to where the imagination can roam, no limits to where thoughts can stretch, no limits to where ambition can lead.

When those big ungainly behemoths are sitting out there - especially knowing that they have no right there - they belong off Tinian's shores - no such freedom from limits exists. Their presence is a blot on the horizon, a constant reminder of the horrors of war, the potential ugliness of military power. It leaves no room for inspiration and aspirations.

Perhaps now is the time to insist that they return to the original agreement that they anchor off Tinian, so that the Tinian Dynasty may have the advantage of their proximity?

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Is it possible for humans to exist without war? Despite the savagery and destruction of nuclear war, armed battle continues throughout the world, not only in Kosovo, but in Sri Lanka, in Pakistan, in the Congo, in Ethiopia and Eritrea. New threats have popped up in the Spratlys, in the China/Taiwan dispute, in Montenegro. Will humans ever learn?

The U.N. has a "peace-keeping" force, but whatever happened to its peace-making powers? One doesn't read about U.N. efforts at mediation, at arbitration. That seems to occur only on an individual nation basis.

At least on a small - and local - scale, there is some hope. The family court has introduced mediation as a means of settling disputes brought up in its jurisdiction. The court hopes to bring mediation skills to school students as well. We all need such skills - how to settle fights and disagreements without the use of violence. Maybe the family court could also bring their skills to the inmates of our correctional facilities, to the community at large?

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First it was the Ports Authority, imposing parking fees. Then it was the Department of Public Safety, cracking down on traffic offenders. (Cracking down on pimps and prostitutes doesn't count - DPS is only doing that, according to press reports, because of pressures from the federal government.) Now it's the Public School System, proposing to charge students for bussing, text books - all in an effort to overcome the on-going budget shortfall.

What next? Will the Division of Public Lands raise the lease fees it charges developers? (though that might be a good thing in any case....) Will NMHC raise its rents? Will CUC raise

its rates? Will members of the Legislature start charging rental fees for their tables and tents? (but of course, they're not short of funds....) Will the Mayor's office start charging for the water it delivers, the coral it provides for parking at funerals? Will the courts increase filing fees and fines? The Department of Commerce raise its filing fees? The CCAC start charging admission? The public library increase its rental and penalty fees? Opportunity seems limited only by the imagination.....

If surcharges are going to be levied, doesn't it make better sense to do it on a more fair, more consistent, more general basis? The idea of a sales tax has been so unwelcome it doesn't even seem to come up in discussions. But perhaps that too should change? It could, for example, be levied on all retail sales except retail groceries. It could be passed with a sunset provision to make sure it was only temporary. Wouldn't that be simpler?

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A rather euphemistic press release carried by the <I>Marianas Variety</I> last week claimed that federal Army Corps of Engineers officials were almost finished cleaning up PCBs in Tanapag. The work had been done, according to the press release, by subjecting the PCB to "thermal absorption" but that was temporarily stopped due to "equipment problems." Now, claimed the spokesperson, ACE will be "just taking away the remaining chemicals out of Saipan."

The truth of the matter is that the company first hired by the ACE had been digging up the contaminated soil, bringing to the work site, and "cooking" the soil. This was a new approach, and cost the company more money than it had anticipated, causing it to back out of the project. A second company brought in by the ACE decided to remove the soil instead, and it's now been bagged ready for shipment to the U.S. Most of the "cooking" equipment, which presumably was also contaminated, has also been removed. However, there is more still stacked at the work site.

Will that be left behind?

Yet that doesn't end the problem. The ACE is taking only the more highly contaminated soil. What remains is still contaminated, only less so. It will take another round of Congressional funding for hazardous site clean up before the rest of the contamination can be treated.

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Grammar lesson for the week: The word "effectivity" is a noun. One can write, or speak of, the effectivity of a given action - though even here, the simpler "effectiveness" would seem to do just as well. If one substitutes "effectiveness" for "effectivity" in the phrase "effectivity date" it should immediately become clear why the phrase is incorrect. The adjectival form, "effective," is what is required here.