

On My Mind

5/11/01

It's taken a while, but at least it is finally here - an opportunity for students to explore and begin branching out into different career paths while still in high school. The Public School System has announced that by the beginning of next year, three different paths will be open to students: agriculture, tourism, business, and computer technology at the new Kagman high school; education, fine arts, information technology and communication at Koblerville; and construction design and engineering technology, family health and consumer services, and automotive technology at Marianas High School.

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The recognition that individual students are not all the same, that they have different interests, inclinations and aspirations, has been slow to see implementation in the public school system. The recognition that even such a relatively small community as that in the CNMI has a wide diversity of needs in terms of the knowledge and skills of its members - and that it is in large part the function of the public school system to meet those needs - has been equally slow in being acted upon.

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It will be neither simple nor inexpensive to work out all the details of the varied programs - to obtain trained instructors, to acquire necessary equipment, to provide appropriate facilities. The program will need support not only from PSS itself, but also the full support of the legislature, the executive branch, and the community at large in order to meet its ambitious and laudatory goals. Let us hope that even though it's election year, that cooperation will be freely and fully forthcoming.

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The scene at the so-called post-secondary education level, at Northern Marianas College, is somewhat different. Judging from recent announcements, NMC intends to continue focusing on teacher training - a focus it has consistently pursued since its beginnings as a teacher training institute. NMC will be offering, according to press stories, undergraduate degrees in Vocational Education and Liberal Arts, and, in cooperation with off-island institutions, master's degrees in three aspects of education, with only one program in another field: a masters in business administration.

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That is as it should be. The CNMI's primary training need - and focus - should be education, for today's students will, after all, become tomorrow's leaders. NMC has contributed substantially to meeting this need in the past. Its function as educator and trainer of not only teachers, but also school system principals and administrators is an on-going need within the CNMI, and continues to be a vital and essential role for NMC for the foreseeable future.

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But the CNMI also needs higher education programs in other areas. Legislators could benefit from degrees in comparative government, or marine policy, or international trade, or environmental science, for example. There is also a need - within government, and in the private sector - for people with degrees in such areas as engineering, health or environmental

policy, communication technology, law and medicine.

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No single institution the size of NMC should be expected to provide such a broad variety of educational programs. NMC, after all, has just begun offering its own four-year degrees. Moreover, with NMC focusing on education, it would seem only logical to invite and encourage other post-secondary educational institutions to come in with offerings in other fields. And indeed, there have been such offers.

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Unfortunately, NMC seems paranoid in this regard. It insists that no other post-secondary educational institution be permitted without the express consent and approval of NMC. As <I>Tribune</I> columnist Charlie Reyes put it: "The Northern Marianas College should have no such monopoly powers....Allowing the Northern Marianas College to rule on new college applications would be like granting Joeten Enterprises the power to decide whether a Korean company can operate a grocery store against it. It would clearly be a conflict of interest."

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I wholeheartedly agree. NMC should have no role in determining what other post-secondary institutions are established in the CNMI. He goes on to say that government should have no role in that process, and there I would disagree with him. After all, somewhere along the way, someone has to set, maintain and enforce performance standards.

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Something called "Balloon Bouquet" is advertising balloon bouquets, naturally, for Mother's Day. That's rather fetching. Except balloons - especially in large quantities, as in bouquets - pose environmental risks in island settings. Unless they are properly disposed of.

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Balloons allowed to escape into the atmosphere will eventually come back down - and in an island setting, the chances are pretty good that the balloons will come to rest on the surface of the ocean. Because, particularly in a semi-deflated state, the balloons resemble jelly-fish, they are then consumed by turtles and sea birds. But balloons are indigestible, and clog their digestive systems, causing the turtles and birds to die.

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If you give someone a balloon bouquet, please remember to pop the balloon when the party's over?

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It's disappointing to learn that members of the U.S. Congress can be so childish. The U.S. was not re-elected to the UN Human Rights Commission, and in petty reaction, Congress voted not to make the full payment of delinquent UN dues it had promised. It has chosen to ignore the fact that UN members may not be happy with the U.S. failure to support the Kyoto global warming treaty, with its aggressive stance against China regarding human rights, with its perceived arrogance against smaller nations.

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Instead, U.S. House members have viewed the voting results as an undeserved insult, and are

reacting accordingly. Not a good role model!

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“Bibliotheca Legalis In Memoria Hominis Qui Virgines Semper Amabat.” That’s what Ken Govendo says the full name of the law library in the Guma Husticio would be if the justices carry out their plan to name the library after Larry Hillblom - the Memorial Law Library for the Man Who Always Loved Virgins.

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Apparently Chief Justice Miguel Demapan announced, in his state of the judiciary address last week, that the law library would be named after Hillblom. Govendo expressed his objections in a letter to the editor printed in today’s <I>Variety</I>. While Hillblom might be due recognition for his achievements regarding DHL, or Marianas CableVision, his achievements as special judge do not merit such recognition, said Govendo. Moreover, “you don’t name law libraries after pedophiles,” he wrote.

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I agree. Hillblom was a colorful character. In his lifetime, he was something of a political pyromaniac. Recognition of his role in CNMI politics would not be inappropriate. But he simply did not have the moral standards to qualify for judiciary honors.

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Former Chamber of Commerce president Lynn Knight has written a passionate defense of the Chamber’s ability to remain objective in conducting political debates scheduled for this summer. The letter, which appears in today’s <I>Tribune</I>, was in response to an opinion column in yesterday’s <I>Variety</I>, in which columnist Robert Myers wrote, among other things, that “the fact that two ranking officials of the Chamber of Commerce are blatantly partisan suggests how the upcoming forums will be used.” Myers was referring to Ms. Knight, former Chamber president and currently vice-president of corporate affairs, Tan Holdings Company, and Tony Pellegrino, whom Myers described as a close ally of Benigno Fitial - both of whom “are hard at work behind the scenes” in organizing the debates, according to Myers.

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Knight might want to bear in mind the burden faced by members of the judiciary, also charged with being impartial: the need to avoid even the appearance of conflict of interest. Their solution is to recuse themselves. Knight might want to consider doing the same. Conceivably, there may not be conflict in this case. But the appearance is certainly inescapable.