

On My Mind

3/4/05

Contrary to the statement, twice-repeated in the pages of this past Monday's issue of the <EM>Marianas Variety</EM>, Pacific Telecom Inc., due to become the new owner of Verizon's MTC, will not then become a franchise under Verizon. PTI is an independent entity, and will thus have no relationship, no connection, with Verizon once it assumes ownership of MTC.

That there will no longer be a large, fiscally sound and internationally known organization behind the CNMI's local telecommunications company is, in fact, what has been at the heart of the governor's concerns with the terms of the purchase of MTC by PTI - a fact the import of which I myself had not fully grasped until just this past week. What I had not seen - or understood - before was that the governor's concerns have, in essence, focused on the strength and stability of PTI's corporate structure, and the soundness of its financial resources. The specific aspects of these concerns have changed over the months, as resolution of aspects of the negotiations was achieved. But the focus of the concerns has not changed, nor have the remaining concerns yet been satisfactorily addressed.

More specifically, while the Commonwealth Telecommunications Commission has accepted the reports of its two financial consultants, Deloitte Touche and Economists.com, the Commission has not yet <ital>accepted</ital> the recommendations made by its consultants in those reports. The decision will, reportedly, be made in the form of final orders issued by the Commission. And, depending on how the Commission rules, those orders may be appealed, according to Jay Livingstone, the assistant AG serving as the governor's counsel in the MTC-PTI transaction.

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In terms of a partial fibre-optic cable divestiture - which the governor has insisted upon, and PTI has so far refused to consider - it is becoming increasingly clear that MTC's monopoly, which it appears PTI intends to continue, is already adversely affecting the CNMI's economy. Livingstone explained - over a long lunch earlier this week - that the CNMI offers an ideal location for what are known as server farms and call centers - both of which would benefit from the U.S. tax laws, low labor costs and geographical location, and both of which could bring in sufficient revenue to help off-set the garment industry decline. But at the current cable access rates charged by MTC in the past, PTI in the future, those ventures are not cost-effective, he said.

The issue of cable divestiture is destined to be resolved as a "contested" case, separate from the main purchase agreement, and will be heard by the Commission with briefs submitted by all three interested parties - the governor, the consumer counsel and MTC/PTI.

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add re MV article 3/1, p 17 on Verizon competition.....

Though it was buried on page 8 of the <EM>Pacific Sunday News</EM>, word that there now are paper cups that are decomposable, biodegradable, and insulated - so they won't burn the holder's hand - may turn out to be one of the most important stories in decades. Trash disposal and the land fills to hold it, have been an increasing problem of late - not only in the CNMI and

in Guam, but as unhealthy and vermin-ridden blights on the landscape, world-wide.

One of the many undesirable components of that accumulated trash was styrofoam - as used in cups, plates, take-out dishes., etc. While some places have tried to ban such use of styrofoam, since it is neither biodegradable nor decomposable, it has been a difficult battle, since it is so convenient, and no readily-acceptable substitute has been available.

Now comes word that thanks to a request from the U.S. Navy, a paper company in Ohio has created such a substitute - in fact 20 million of them: cups that meets the Navy's criteria of being decomposable, biodegradable and won't burn a sailor's hand. According to the article, which originally came from <EM>The Cincinnati Inquirer</EM>, the U.S. Army has inquired about cups for its troops, but in brown rather than white, since white cups, according to the article, can be picked up on overhead satellite photos, which could put troops at risk.

No mention was made in the article about how soon the cups would be available on the open market, but once they are, styrofoam should be outlawed - everywhere. In the meantime, we should all put pressure on manufacturers to make it happen sooner rather than later.

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The <EM>PDN</EM> has been full of stories and ideas about trash disposal, while Guam struggles with where to put its next landfill, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency having put Guam on notice to close its Ordot dump. Another site has been approved by the local environmental agency, but many people are not happy with the choice. John Wittmayer, a Guam resident, in his "Devil's Advocate" column in the <EM>Marianas Variety</EM> several weeks ago, suggested that Guam recycle or re-use 100% of its waste, rather than the mere 2% it is now re-cycling.

Wittmayer would do this by imposing a green tax on all non-biodegradable products high enough to enable Guam to either return everything that was imported back to its country of origin, or find a way of re-cycling it. A beginning has already been made with the implementation, in Guam, of an "advanced disposal fee" law passed by its legislature last year. As of March 1, fees are to be tacked on to the purchase price of trucks, busses, cars, tires, appliances, batteries, and heavy equipment and will be deposited into a revolving recycling fund that will pay for the items' eventual disposal.

With concern already expressed that the CNMI's new landfill in Marpi is filling up more rapidly than expected, isn't high time that we did the same?

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While space for burials has not yet become a problem in the area, another environmentally friendly idea I've come across of late is the Eternal Reef. Arin Greenwood, free-lance writer currently an Assistant AG in the CNMI Attorney General's office, reported on the idea in an article in the on-line publication <EM>Strata Magazine</EM>. Eternal Reefs are round cast-concrete structures weighing as much as 4,000 pounds and full of holes. The reefs consist of pollutant-free concrete and human remains and are designed to last more than 500 years. They are deployed in ocean areas needing more fish habitat - so far off the coasts of Florida, Maryland, North and South Carolina, Texas and Virginia. According to , over 500,000 so-called

Reef Balls are in use world-wide.

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offers man-made memorial reefs that are an ecological alternative to cremation products and services. Cremated remains are mixed with concrete during the formation of "Reef Balls" -- structures that resemble natural reef formations and are designed to last more than 500 years. Eternal Reefs has joined numerous Reef Balls to create reefs in Florida, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. Reef Balls can weigh up to 4,000 pounds and incorporate the cremains of as many as four people or pets. The firm partners with Reef Ball Development Group Ltd. to develop scientifically designed artificial reefs. Some 500,000 Reef Balls are in use worldwide.

Wrote Greenwood, "Family members are also provided with exact latitude and longitude coordinates of the reef ball of interest to them, so that they can visit the artificial reefs on their own."

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An Eternal Reef is a two ton artificial reef consisting of pollutant-free concrete and human cremains.

The artificial reef (called a "Reef Ball") is an enormous cast-concrete structure, round in shape and covered in holes. Collections of them are deployed in parts of the ocean -- so far mainly in Florida, off its Gulf Coast -- which need more fish habitats. The areas are all sanctioned for this deployment by relevant laws, and, once sunk, the reef balls are donated to the federal, state, or local governments.

Though the human ash doesn't itself add anything environmentally helpful, the concrete reef balls (with or without cremains) are such good hosts for oceanic life that within a year, they're covered with around 400 pounds of biomass, including coral pupae that attach to and then grow on the reef balls, plants that grow around the reef balls, and fish that live inside them.

Cremains can be ensconced in a one person reef ball, or else be part of a "community reef" which contains the cremains of up to five people. (One woman had the ashes of her first husband, her second husband, and her second husband's first wife all put into one reef ball.) The cremains get all mixed together in the community reef balls, but each person gets his or her own commemorative brass plaque, said plaque becoming a permanent part of the artificial reef.

During special deployment ceremonies, loved ones of the person or people whose ashes are included in a particular reef ball take a boat out to the designated site and watch as the reef balls are sunk.

The designated sites can be visited by paddlers, scuba divers, and other watery types. The company that makes the Eternal Reefs (Eternal Reefs, Inc.) is in the process of developing a video system that will also allow land lubbers to watch the reefs on the internet.

-Wouldn't it be nice if both sides of the "Dekada" issue stopped pontificating, and addressed the issues? Cited the sources they are using in support of their positions?

The Constitution states, unequivocally, that "the legislature shall enact no law which increases the class of nonaliens" (except for immediate relatives as defined in the Covenant). So it would appear that only some very fancy footwork could accommodate the desire of long-staying foreign workers to change their status for the better.

Further, the Covenant states that its Article III, "Citizenship and Nationality" - which defines who, residing in the CNMI, may become a U.S. citizen - may only be modified with the consent of both the U.S. and the CNMI. So it does not appear that the U.S. Congress, either, has the power to change the status of people residing in the CNMI. Presumably, it is this section that Dekada attorney Steve Woodruff claims he has found a way around, and it is this same section that Washington Rep Pete A. Tenorio is relying on for his position that

Zoning priority - strip malls

sad that doctors who go into nursing deprive community of doctor services

At the risk of alienating self-proclaimed movie critic Joe Weindl even further, I would disagree most strongly about his alleged disclaimer, which appeared in this past Tuesday's issue of the <EM>Tribune</EM>, that film critics have no impact on box office sales of a movie. Weindl chastised me last week for my letter to the editor regarding the "F" grade - which he eventually explained was a computer error- given to "Baptists at my Barbecue" in his weekly rating grid, saying I should have addressed my letter to him, rather than to the media.

I can't be the only one who reads reviews in trying to decide to go to the movies.