

On My Mind

4/15/05

One reprint from mainland papers that has not made it into our local papers and should have is the article from a recent issue of the Washington Post, sent to me by a friend last week. The article, "Innovation, not Quotas," by Gary Heiman, president and chief executive of Standard Textile Co., based in Cincinnati, says that most of the garment manufacturing industry is using the wrong approach in trying to counter the loss of business, the decline in orders, brought about by the recent lifting of garment quotas. Instead of trying to simply increase production and/or to lower the costs of what they now produce, Heiman suggests garment manufacturers try innovation, instead.</P>

"A small minority of U.S. textile companies, including ours," he writes, "took a different approach. These companies chose to pour resources into R&D to come up with new manufacturing technologies, giving themselves the ability to create the kinds of specialized products that were not being developed elsewhere. These include synthetic towels and sheets made with new weaving technologies, surgical gowns, fabrics used in agriculture, high-fashion apparel, and fire-resistant workwear....</P>

"If more American textile and apparel manufacturers had been less insular, more willing to look for customers overseas instead of only within our borders, they would have improved their chances to grow.... We, for example, sell to 49 countries. Rather than banking on high-powered lobbyists to stave off the march of globalization, we welcome the end of quotas.</P>

"It's not too late for more U.S. textile companies to shift course and adapt. Their survival will depend in large part on their ability to innovate and stay a step ahead of competitors elsewhere.... Technological ingenuity has always created new American jobs in the past. This can - and must - happen in my industry."</P>

He concludes, "... unfortunately, there is no doubt this industry's American manufacturing base will continue to shrink in a quota-free world. But desperately and defiantly clinging to protectionism is not the way to meet this challenge. The answer is to innovate, export, become active in the global marketplace and become competitive again."</P>

It may, however, be too late for the CNMI's garment industry, which only assembles - rather than manufactures - cloth, and does not seem to have the resources to pour into research and development in any case.</P>

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Let's hope it is not, however, too late for the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation to be saved. Bringing in Abe Malae, former head of American Samoa's Power Authority, could be a life-saver - if he is indeed given the job of CUC head, and - an even bigger if - he is given the support to carry out his responsibilities.</P>

Malae should be familiar to at least some in the CNMI - he participated -very impressively - in several programs that were part of the regional Environmental Protection Agency conference on

Guam four years ago - most memorably, on a panel describing his very successful efforts to improve operations and management of his agency in American Samoa.</P>

But the CNMI is a bigger place, CUC is highly politicized, and there is bound to be resentment at an "outsider's" taking over - already, deplorably enough, expressed by former CUC head Timothy Villagomez - even though Malae is a fellow Pacific Islander. Villagomez made his comments in a recent letter to Governor Babauta, according to a story in Thursday's Saipan Tribune.</P>

I'm not sure Malae is aware of the nature of the den of wolves into which he is being thrown (assuming he is hired - CUC was to meet on the question as this is being written). I can only hope that he will be given time to gain understanding of the problems, that his experience and judgment will be acknowledged and respected, and that his approach will be given a chance to be tested and tried. He did wonders for American Samoa. He could do the same here - if we let him.</P>

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If you've been wondering about those random mileage indicators - those small signs with "4½," or "7," or "1" along some of our roads - what I learned from Public Work's Highway section is that the mileages are calculated for each road, rather than for destinations, and that the measuring begins where the road begins, running from south to north, and from west to east.</P>

The mileage calculations - and indicators - for Middle Road, for example, begin with zero at Chalan Msgr. Guerrero (airport road) and increase as the road goes north. I forgot to ask where Beach Road begins, for this purpose.</P>

At any rate, all the mileage indicators tell you is how many miles of the particular road you are on you've already traveled. They don't tell you how far it is to anywhere, just how far you've been. Not sure just how useful that really is.... Let's hope there wasn't too much money spent on the project.</P>

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Short takes:

- I misspoke - or rather, mis-wrote, last week, when I noted that SHARC stood for Swift and Harper Architects, Inc. I knew better - but I had architects on my mind since I'd been trying - unsuccessfully - to locate one I met on my flight from Denpasar to Guam a couple of weeks ago. SHARC stands for Swift and Harper Archaeological Resource Consulting. My apologies to archaeologists Marilyn Swift and Randy Harper!</P>

The architect I was pre-occupied with had told me he knew of the connection between Java and its large Buddhist relic of Borabadur on Java - which I had just visited - and the CNMI, and mentioned a tribal name. Foolishly, I did not write it down. He told me he was an architect from Guam, working on the re-modelling of Saipan's Dai Ichi, and that he was born in Jakarta - but he did not have a business card with him. I gave him mine, and he promised to e-mail me the details of what he'd mentioned. But he hadn't, and I was trying to track him down. So far, to no avail.</P>

- In response to my comment, last week, about parking lots in Susupe being paved with asphalt as part of a beautifying project, an always alert reader wrote to tell me about a song which goes, in part, "Don't it always seem to go/That you don't know what you've got/Till it's gone/They paved paradise/And put up a parking lot." My reader informed me that the lines are from a Joni Mitchell song popular about 35 years ago titled, "Big Yellow Taxi." And to think we haven't learned to do any better in the meantime!</P>

- Whoever is doing the diabetes ads that have been showing up in both the Marianas Variety and the Saipan Tribune is doing a great job. The ads are interesting, informative, eye-catching, tasteful, friendly without being aggressive...everything a good public relations effort should be. All you PIOs out there: take note!</P>

- Thanks to the benign rains we've been getting of late - not too heavy, or accompanied by too much wind - all the efforts of whoever it is that takes care of roadway beautification on Saipan are really paying off. Middle Road is actually quite lovely, in parts, with all the colors, all the blooms, all the trimming.</P>

- Random wonderings: Why do we need another spread-out two-story building/strip mall right next to Hakubotan in San Jose? Hakubotan has been sitting empty for quite some time. If its owner can't fill it, why does anyone think the building next door will find clients? What is the story on Hakubotan, anyway? Zoning Board, where are you?</P>

- A question for the Emergency Management Office and the Commonwealth Health Center: Both times ash alerts have been announced recently, EMO and CHC have told people to "disconnect" their water catchment systems so that the ash would not contaminate their water supply. But the way my water catchment system is set up, that's not so easy to do. I have a peaked, not flat, roof, on top of a two-story building, so it's not easy to get on the roof to begin with, and a little precarious to walk on it in any case. My catchment system consists of gutters all around the house at the roof edge, with the water flowing into a water catchment tank along one side of the roof.</P>

I have no idea how to "disconnect" this system. I am certainly not going to try climb on the roof and try to devise some sort of blockage so that the water doesn't enter my catchment tank. Not only would that put a burden on my gutters, but it would make a mess wherever that water then ends up being spilled. Does anyone out there have any simple, affordable solutions for this? Otherwise, I wish people would please stop telling me to "disconnect" my water catchment system!</P>

- It's that time again - fund-raising for the CNMI's only public radio station, KRNM. It happens twice a year. In the past, the response has been negligible, to put it mildly. If only everyone who listened to "Car Talk," or "Fresh Air," or the BBC news, or "Motley Fool," or "Justice Talking," or any of KRNM's wonderful and varied music programs, were willing to contribute as little as \$5.00 each! Those programs cost money, and we all suffer when KRNM can no longer afford to obtain them.</P>

Donations may be made at Northern Marianas College, by calling Carl Pogue at 234-5766 or

234-5498, ext 1520, by mailing a check to KRNM, c/o NMC, at P.O. Box 501250, Saipan, MP 96950, or - new this year - by stopping by at the "Auto Glass Pro/Saipan Bike Pro" shop on Beach Road just north of 13 Fishermen's Monument, where payment can be made by credit card.
DO IT TODAY!!!!</P>