

On My Mind

3/24/06

Happy Covenant Day! It was thirty years ago today that U.S. President Gerald Ford officially brought the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands into existence as an entity in its own right, separate from and independent of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, when he signed a resolution passed by the U.S. Congress that approved the CNMI's covenant with the United States.

The CNMI stands unique among the states and territories of the U.S. It is the only area acquired by the U.S. by means other than war, treaty, or purchase. And as such, it has special rights and privileges that none of the other states and territories have. It is the Covenant, "An Honorable Accord" as noted attorney Howard Willens put it in his fascinating book on the subject, that spells out these differences, that gives the CNMI its unique status.

The NMI Council for the Humanities is to be admired for its observance of Covenant Day - it has, of late, sponsored an annual debate on topics related to the Covenant - yesterday's being on immigration and the minimum wage. Yet it strikes me as lamentable that not yet - after thirty years - has an official appropriate commemoration been established for such a significant date in the CNMI's history.

The release from Camp Susupe after World War II is more celebrated than Covenant Day. Wouldn't a parade, and fire works, and a pageant and a fair on Covenant Day be a bigger draw for tourists? A bigger boost to local pride?

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Similarly, one could ask, wouldn't a local public farmer and fishermen's market, with all the related enhancements, be a bigger boost to local pride than a foreign-built and -patronized floating hotel? 'The accent is on the wrong syllable,' as a once-popular song put it, if Saipan's prime public beach front is given to outsiders for their benefit, with benefits to the CNMI being only secondary.

Public land in the CNMI belongs to the people. Should they be shunted off to the hills, to the small, dirty, rocky beaches so that outsiders can benefit? Hasn't enough prime public beach front land already been given over to tourism? Particularly since, as has been the traditional practice, public land is given away for far less than its real worth - as though it were an expendable commodity, when in fact, public land is becoming more and more scarce.

Yes, the CNMI is in dire economic straits. And yes, perhaps the building of more hotels will improve the situation - though, it should be pointed out, that is not at all certain, since tourist arrivals have been going down, not up. And yes, the governor is to be applauded for finding all those potential investors who have promised to bring their business to the CNMI.

But what about the people of the CNMI? Where do they fit into the picture? What about their interests, and their rights, and their livelihoods? Bringing in more hotels only opens up menial positions - maids, waitresses, laundry workers, hotel clerks - which will require more imported

labor. If the emphasis were put on improving tourist attractions, rather than tourist accommodations, a much greater variety of jobs would open up - such as trail guides, scuba instructors, handicraft shops, Chatauqua performers, museum docents - and the little remaining public land would still be available to the local community for its use and enjoyment. The governor should honor his constituents, and not sacrifice them to the interests of commercialism.

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Short takes:

- It seems incredible to me that what with the continuing high cost of fuel, the administration has not yet ordered government offices to raise their thermostat settings, but rather, persists in demanding that people wear ties to work, and persists in setting as model its own wearing of long-sleeved shirts.
- A new source of information about the oceans around us has begun airing week-ends on KCNM/KZMI. Dr. Teny Topalian, resident director of the Pacific Islands Regional Office of NOAA, has taken to the airwaves on Saturday and Sunday morning for short presentations on subjects related to the marine environment. She's on at 9:00 a.m., both days.
- The CNMI Emergency Management Office has informed me that the same clock-setting site I mentioned in last week's column - that actually labels our time zone as "Chamorro time" - can also be accessed through its web page at <[www.cnmiemo.gov.mp](http://www.cnmiemo.gov.mp)>.
- My brother and I, both in our seventies, have become quite involved in issues dealing with the environment - his concern has focussed on groundwater protection and use in northern Vermont - though we had not been particularly concerned when we were younger. He has started a newsletter, joined a local council, conducts letter campaigns, etc. We've concluded that maybe the explanation is that unless an environmental issue affects someone directly, commonly those issues are of only secondary importance to people still struggling to put food on the table, pay the rent, keep their head above water.

boards and continuity  
mercury-tainted fish

<http://www.ehjournal.net/content/3/1/7>

The International Agency on Cancer Research (IARC) has classified employment in the boot and shoe manufacturing industry as a Group 1 risk factor, meaning there is sufficient evidence that the exposure or setting is carcinogenic to humans [6]. A number of chemicals used in the shoe and boot manufacturing industry including chlorophenols, hexavalent chromium, aniline and azo dyes and benzene are known or suspected carcinogens. Of these, benzene has most often been implicated as a likely etiologic agent in the development of leukaemia among workers in the industry. IARC has classified benzene exposure as a Group 1 carcinogen [7] and the United

States Environmental Protection Agency has also characterized benzene as a known human carcinogen for all routes of exposure based upon convincing evidence from human studies and supporting evidence from animal studies [8,9]. Exposure to benzene has been most strongly associated with acute myeloid leukaemia, the most common type of leukaemia in adults [7,9].

A number of epidemiological reports have shown an association between employment in the shoe and boot manufacturing industry and an increased risk of leukaemia mortality among workers in Italy, Turkey and Great Britain [10-15]. The workers found to be most at risk were those who worked in specific jobs where exposure to solvents and glues containing high levels of benzene was common. In Great Britain, elevated mortality rates were found only among workers in the departments where solvents and glues were used to attach soles to the upper parts of shoes, and exposure to benzene occurred [12]. In Italy there was also evidence that the elevated risk of leukaemia was highest among workers who began work prior to 1963, after which time glues containing high levels of benzene were banned by law [13,14]. A follow-up of the Italian cohort of workers found that the risk of leukaemia increased with increasing cumulative exposure to benzene [15]. Similar results, however, have not been reported in studies of mortality among workers in shoe and boot manufacturing in the United States [16-19].

However, many of the most carcinogenic chemicals, which at one time were used in the industry, have not been used for several decades.

Nonetheless, lessons learned from retrospective analyses of disease among workers in American industries may be applicable to overseas industries, particularly in developing nations, where many of the safeguards and restrictions that have been in place for decades in the US and Europe have not yet been adopted.

"There is no direct consequence between some EU shoe makers' losses and China's shoe exports to EU countries following the end of the global quota system on January 1, 2005. Chinese shoe makers oppose the EU's unfair anti-dumping probe," says the announcement.

[http://www.shanghaidaily.com/art/2006/02/09/241111/Body\\_set\\_up\\_to\\_unify\\_shoe\\_makers\\_against\\_EU\\_probe.htm](http://www.shanghaidaily.com/art/2006/02/09/241111/Body_set_up_to_unify_shoe_makers_against_EU_probe.htm)

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The increasing speed of innovation has forced companies to invest heavily into R&D initiatives in order to ensure their products remain at the cutting edge, particularly within the sports footwear sector.

To combat cost increases, the market's leading players have used their scale economies to decrease suppliers' prices.

Adidas' acquisition of Reebok will provide the company with a significantly larger scale economy with which to compete against global market leader

Nike.<http://www.marketresearch.com/product/display.asp?productid=1200407&SID=88376151-344750205-298384170>

Comparisons to Guam re schooling, new approach to tourism (see clippings)

In order for CNMI to activate those ships to assist CNMI, some things have to be in order. First, the President of the United States must first declare our area as a Disaster Area, then DHS-FEMA will come into play as those ships are DOD assets. Next, if we see that we will need them, we will recommend to the Governor to request it thru FEMA.

re: Grotto dive and lack of appropriate investigation (police tested gear above water, not under water)

I love the way it is assumed that everyone has access to tv.....

Also Fiji guy vs Abe Malae - slick! But cover different areas.....STILL need Malae - for mgmt.

The CNMI may be suffering from a slowing economy, but strangely enough, that doesn't seem to affect the restaurant business. Several new restaurants and coffee shops have opened recently, and two I know of have added lunch service to their former dinner-only hours. There's the new Chinese restaurant next to Wendy's on Beach Road, and two new restaurants, one Japanese and the other Jeff Boyer's new place, across from Memorial Park in Garapan. Then there are the new coffee shops - one in As Lito, one in Susupe next to Church's chicken restaurant, and the other Jeff Boyer's, which also has a coffee bar.

Both Naked Fish, itself a fairly new restaurant, and the Abyss have recently begun opening for lunch.

What does it mean? Of course, restaurants close, too. But it doesn't seem to be at the same rate as new ones open. Are more people eating out? Are people merely looking for a new experience? Or are restaurants settling for smaller and smaller pieces of the same pie - as the same number of people now have an even wider choice than before?

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PSS - and others - need to build accountability into funds granted by legislature - Trib 5/9 p 2

small scale venture: publish Sam's students' works  
what are Chinese tourists going to do? Jap/ war sites not of interest  
availability of info not necessarily an FOIA issue - but of who knows, and who is willing to share  
on Guam, see truck emitting black smoke, told to report it (PDN 4/26) True in CNMI?

government by cliff-hanging - CUC fuel payments, PSS teacher payments, HPMPR renewal

Iraq war - technology keeps more wounded alive - though wounds may be terrible.....(clipping)

NMC accreditation satisfied by La Fiesta transfer - who accredits NMC gov't for acquisition?

Illegal dumping at PR dump shows need for transfer station

whatever happened to social eyesore beauty contest?

From Ed Klingsberg: Randy Fennel says law requires member of Treasury present at opening of poker machines; metered NMC reduced cost in half! ; JoeTen opposes increase in minimum wage since it hires so many locals

punitive fee for littering not big enough to deter people from doing so

need for large meeting places when JoeTen library space gone

corporations not held responsible, held accountable since not considered person

war on terrorists being won; war on terrorism is not.

Give aid, education, to countries where immigrants coming from. If have it there, won't emigrate...from UN report on economic and social affairs

Open airport to other vendors - magazines and books and newspapers (need to check!)

Highway bill

Zoning priority - strip malls

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

would add, in addition to very limited tourism infrastructure, the failing local infrastructure generally--power of late, the constant beach pollution and lack of responsiveness (here and Guam) to federal threats of fines for maintaining a healthy community, water quality problems on both islands. Also, year after year, vandalism of property and purse snatchings, graffiti and litter, show (at best) no improvement in solving the problem.

Also, the hotels are now entering the maintenance upkeep stages of their lives (note the upgrades and improvements being made); the newness factor gone. The challenges of dealing with ever-changing local laws and regulations re: labor and other threats (I think the attempt to take back the Nikko by Ted Mitchell left a big imprint on Japanese investment/economic observers as JAL/Nikko was prepared to implode the hotel before they left if forced out of their multi-year agreement) has made this a tough place for someone to sensibly try and get something started.

The days of venture (risk) capital are gone for Japan. There aren't too many Willie (deep pockets) Tan's around who have the money to put up now, and even if things continue to slide, or crash, he will own a major chunk of the island when things start to turn around some day. Plus, he is getting things on the cheap these days. Also, he has long known the ways of the island, which buttons to push, which local people to lobby, his local staff being well-paid to protect his interests.

The Chamber and others (existing businesses talking about CDA's QC) say not enough attention paid on longtime investment folks, keeping them happy. True, from my observation point. They are taken for granted. Frank points out that the hotels are changing hands; new buyers. But the sale price has to represent a major loss.

The cliff-like falloff in new business started with the advent of the \$100,000 security deposit. But it took years for its cumulative effect to take hold. And, finally, just recently, has it been done away with.

The CNMI is surely its own worst enemy when it comes to understanding the economic world. Bill Stewart has said for years, not for publication, 'the CNMI has done wrong just about everything possible, to undermine its own economic future.'

I can't believe someone in MVA isn't meeting with airline executives, hotel executives, and tour executives every week. Airlines, hotels, and tour companies are the life blood of our tourist industry. Somebody should be on top of this at all times. (Bud)

It would be irresponsible to pretend that I have any answers. But one can speculate. One of the tertiary reasons could very well be the increase pressures to be put on the tourism industry with a closure and downsizing of the garment industry. Any hotel manager who has been here any time at all would probably realize that far more pressures is going to put on the industry to make up for the losses in tax revenues. This at a time where media challenges of increased fuel costs and airline transportation is tempting JAL to seek greener pastures.. Combine that with the somewhat overenthusiastic and optimistic projections about the benefits of the new Chinese tourism market could have raise alarm bells within the Japanese community. I would also add that the Commonwealth has done very little to improve the tourism infrastructure in the past 20 years. This is leading more and more tourist to select more aggressively marketed destinations. Unfortunately, we have consistently been convinced that our proximity and historical ties with Japan would guarantee a constant market. No matter what happens in the rest of the world. (Sam)