

On My Mind  
12/28/07

Some readers will already have seen this, since it appeared in both the *Saipan Tribune* and the *Marianas Variety*. Nonetheless, I am including it here, as taken from the web site and slightly edited, because it is such a good idea - eminently creative, logical, do-able - and more people know about it, the more likely it is that something will actually be done to bring it about. Titled "Imagine This," it first appeared on Angelo Villagomez' blog < [www.thesaipanblogger.com](http://www.thesaipanblogger.com) > on December 25.

"The Garapan Tourist District should be the premier real estate in Saipan. Sandwiched between the Saipan Lagoon and a national park, with easy walking access to several hotels, an elementary school, health clubs, restaurants, bars, shopping centers, and a three- mile long walking path fronting the ocean, it should be the perfect place to raise a family.

"But it's not. It's the manky [sic] armpit of our once beautiful island.

"Imagine what living in Garapan could be like: Imagine that you are a young professional with a small one or two bedroom apartment on the third floor of one of the buildings in the "new" Garapan. You share it with your husband and your daughter.

"You wake up in the morning and go for a six-mile run along the Saipan Bike path, then jog over to Club Elan for some weightlifting or yoga. Fresh from a shower at the spa, you walk to one of the Chinese restaurants and have breakfast for \$4.

"You walk back to the apartment to help your husband get your daughter ready for school.

"Your daughter likes you to walk her to school, which is right across the street, so you take her over, kiss her goodbye, wish her luck on her test, and then go to work.

"You work at MVA, which along with the Saipan Mayor's office and several other government entities, is now located in Garapan. Instead of driving, you walk to work, strolling through the brand new Visitor's Center on your way to your desk.

"Around noon one of your coworkers asks if you want Japanese, Korean or Thai for lunch. You respond with, "how about Italian?" Your husband, who works for the Mayor, walks over to meet you at the restaurant.

"When your daughter gets out of school, you are able to take a fifteen-minute break to pick her up. You take her home, then she goes out to play with her friends. They ride bikes through the national park and then go swimming.

"After work, some of your coworkers want to go for some happy hour drinks, but you promised your daughter you'd take her to the Thursday street market.

"In my vision, almost everything except for government offices being

located in Garapan is already true. It already exists. We can do this. If we can move the prostitution out, move several government offices including MVA in, and get young professionals to live here, we can save Garapan."

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Isn't that an elegant solution? And the beauty of it is, it would cost so little. In fact, I think that if young professionals started to move in, some of the "massage parlors" would move out of their own accord, because their patrons would not want to be seen by the families living there, and additionally, because the families would shame the hucksters on the street into retreating.

Maybe the Marianas Visitors Authority, the Zoning Board and the Paseo committee should get together and offer the first five families that move in some sort of bonus - free CUC hook-ups, perhaps, or a free interior paint job, or cover the rental deposit required - since they would each benefit if Villagomez' vision were to come into being.

Once offices and families move in, one can imagine as well that one or more small sundry shops would also move in, and maybe even a couple of sidewalk cafes, further enlivening the scene. There's a New Year's challenge: who will take the first step?

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Another prime real estate area is Capitol Hill - what with the gorgeous views, the peace and quiet, the large landscaped lots, the good roads, the infrastructure already in place that the Hill offers. Protestations notwithstanding, the claim that the government saved money by putting its offices up there never made sense to me. At present that prime public land is generating no revenue. On the other hand, every government office is equipped with a full kitchen, and showers.....

If the government rented commercial office space instead, it would bolster the local economy, generating revenue for the government, and put money into the pockets of the owners/developers of the properties, thereby generating more revenue, in addition to the revenue generated from rent or mortgage payments paid by residents of the Hill. Whatever happened to those plans to move government back to Susupe?????

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Though the end justifying the means is seldom a civilized approach to problem solving, in the case of global warming, I think the end does justify the means. Some say that global warming is a natural phenomenon - that the earth has always gone through phases, and that the present warming trend is but the most recent one, in which case, all of the effort to counter global warming won't

stop it from happening.

On the other hand, the threat of global warming has caused many people, on many levels, to become far more responsible stewards of Mother Earth, and that, I think, is certainly worth while. The people of the world need to think about saving forests, about ocean pollution, about carbon emissions and air pollution, about maintaining diversity of plants and animals, about species preservation, in any case, and if it takes a fear of the consequences of global warming to motivate them, so be it. Besides, even if warming is inevitable, at least efforts in that direction could slow it down a little.

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A reader objected to my using "holiday season" rather than "Merry Christmas" in last week's column. The practice is being derided as "politically correct," but I would argue that with today's diversity, the use of "holiday season" is a sign of respect for all those in our midst who do not happen to be Christians. Many have a holiday at about the same time, so it seems to me quite appropriate to wish that their holiday be happy as well.

One could, of course, begin using "Christmas" as synonymous with "holiday," arguing that wishing someone "Merry Christmas" is a holiday greeting. But that would dilute the meaning of Christmas and run the risk of cheapening the word (which, as I understand it, originally meant "Christ's Mass"), just as sticky tape is now called Scotch tape, even though all sticky tape is NOT Scotch brand, or all tissues Kleenex, even though not all tissues are Kleenex brand.

But then, I have problems wishing anyone more than personal peace, given the lack of peace, or even hope thereof, in so many places around the world - marred even more by today's tragic news of the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, who only recently returned from exile to run for election as Pakistan's prime minister.

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Short takes:

I don't know that anyone is counting, but I would venture to guess that the present governor wins, hands down, when it comes to the total number of days off-island, off duty, taken by CNMI governors during their term of office.

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Poor TaoTao Tano group - it keeps getting into muddier and muddier water. Too bad its leaders don't have the good sense, the good judgment, to stick to valid issues that do afflict the CNMI. What, for instance, ever happened to that tour of CUC it was going to take and film and show the rest of us?

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Reminder: American Memorial Park's free First Sunday of the Month classical film series will feature "Philadelphia Story," starring Cary Grant, Jimmy

Stewart and Katherine Hepburn, at 2:00 p.m. on January 6.

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New Year's? May yours be safe! Sad to say, we know it won't be peaceful.....

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Movies: no new ones since 12/25, at which time "Golden Compass," PG-13, was dropped and "Water Horse: Legend of the Deep," PG, was added, for a total of 3 PG's, 2 PG-13's and 2 R's.