

On My Mind  
3/14/08

Recently, the Commonwealth Development Authority said it might take over Pacific Gardenia Hotel Sunset Bar and Grill and operate the facility itself. What if, instead of contracting foreign workers - as would inevitably be necessary to run the place - the CDA wanted to REALLY help the local community and decided to repair and operate the place as a training institute for job-seeking local islanders?

It would take some coordination, but the CDA could hire skilled supervisors to teach local workers how to clean up mold, tear out carpets, prime and repaint rooms, etc. Chamber members or other businesses might be willing to donate the necessary equipment and supplies, or at least offer them at a reduced rate. Even if the workers were paid above local minimum wage, it would be cheaper than hiring dozens of foreign workers to do the same thing - given the added expenses that hiring foreign workers involves.

Once the hotel and restaurant are restored, the CDA could hire experienced managers to train local workers in all aspects of running the hotel and its dining facilities, with the students, as they gained experience, being allowed to take over actual management duties in addition to the many other positions involved in operating a hotel, preparing and serving meals, maintaining equipment, etc.

It would provide jobs to many who are now jobless, or may soon become so. It would provide on-the-job, real-time experience to the students, giving them skills and training they could then use on the open market, as well as in their own homes.

PGH rooms and meals would be offered at reduced rates to anyone willing to put up with perhaps minor inconveniences in exchange for the lower room rate - baseball teams here to practice, the paparazzi here to follow Murai, visiting student groups, even tourists.

Since Northern Marianas College has just announced that it is dropping a number of certificate programs that would have been applicable to work-training at the PGH, it appears it would no longer be possible to hand out NMC certificates as reward for the students' efforts. But perhaps some other form of credit could be devised, either through NMC or the GED program, and perhaps NMC faculty could still be used for some aspects of the training.

CDA might also want to look at the Trades Academy on Guam as a possible model. Guam's Contractors Association set up a Trades Academy about a year ago in preparation for the construction boom expected with the military build-up in Guam. The academy - a private sector initiative - recently added a diesel engine preventative maintenance course to its list of offerings. (Maybe the CNMI should hire its graduates?)

A proposal to establish an on-the-job training program was made once before, when the White Sands Hotel - now part of the Pacific Islands Club - was built. Perhaps this time, it could actually come into being?

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It's too bad members of the TaoTao Tano group don't seem to have enough faith in what they believe in to rely on themselves in deciding what or whom to support - or voice objection against. On the one hand, there's the great civic contribution the group has made in taking on maintenance of the JoeTen Kiyu Library grounds. A worthy and laudable undertaking!

On the other, there are the unseemly and obviously "ghost-written" letters to the editor - two different ones, even - that appeared in the papers this past Monday, that were very clearly NOT written by local TaoTao Tano leaders.

One wonders what happened to the group's intent to tour the power plants at CUC - another most worthy undertaking. I, for one, was eagerly awaiting the TaoTao Tano report. But it seems never to have taken place - unless I missed the story. Could it be that the group was persuaded to drop it - by some invisible member, some anonymous consultant/advisor? Perhaps the same one who writes those shameful letters in the group's name?

Such letters have so soiled, tainted, besmirched Taotao Tano's image that most people I know simply don't bother reading its letters anymore.

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Short takes:

Despite the economic slowdown, a brave businessperson has just opened up a new shop selling beautiful china and porcelain dishes, coffee sets, pencil holders and vases of every size, sort and description - all imported from China. The store is located in the Horizon Building on Beach Road in Garapan, operating as EastWest LLC, with Mei Lynch as president.

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Another relatively new shop has done so well it is expanding: Expressions - Alison Long's stationery, stamping, and candy shop - expects to be moving to the former Wine Cellar location at the foot of Capitol Hill in about three weeks - depending on how long it takes to process the required paperwork.

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Worthy of note is the bright lime green top hat decorating the red and yellow-faced tree stump higher up on the road to Capitol Hill. And a Happy St. Patrick's Day to you too!

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Also worthy of note, but not quite so benign, is that JoeTen is having a big sale this week-end that includes refrigerators - that do not have Energy Star ratings! With the cost of power going ever higher, why is JoeTen selling non-energy-efficient appliances?

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We won't go into the replacement of Police Commissioner Rebecca

Warfield except to note that she got treated pretty shabbily. But here's a challenge to the new commissioner: do as Palau President Tommy Remengesau is reported as doing, and apologize to CNMI tourists who've been robbed. Why is it that on Palau it is so unusual an occurrence that the president himself did the apologizing, as reported in the 3/12 issue of *Marianas Variety*, page 4, when in the CNMI it is so common an event that apparently no one does?

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I'm all for supporting developers - provided their projects do no harm - but I would argue that giving LauLau Bay Golf Resort Saipan a 100% abatement of its Business Gross Revenue, Corporate Income, Excise, Alcoholic Beverage, and Developer Infrastructure taxes for 25 years - as it has requested from the Commonwealth Development Agency in its application for a Qualifying Certificate - is going too far. What's left? How does the CNMI benefit at all? Or is the process so arbitrary that the investors feel they must start the bargaining process with such extremes? Where is sanity?

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I'm also all in favor of saving historical artifacts, but not in the sense reported in an article in today's *Saipan Tribune*, which encourages everyone to pick up whatever relics or artifacts they find and take them home as reminders of their history and culture. Such items lose much of their meaning and significance if their "provenance" is not also preserved. Provenance refers to origin. In the case of relics or artifacts found in the CNMI, their provenance would be where they were found - so that one could determine whether the site was once a burial ground, a battlefield site, location of an earlier village.....

They might be evidence of a settlement not known before; they might provide important information about migration patterns, or tool use or ancient customs; they might help identify a person, confirm a theory, solve a puzzle.

It may be ok to take home an occasional small, isolated object, but it would be better if even those were first brought to the Historic Preservation Office for confirmation that they had no archaeological significance. Larger items or groups of items should be left in place until HPO has had a chance to check out the site. Otherwise, what is known of the history and culture of the island and its inhabitants cannot go further, cannot expand or be added to.

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Kudos to *Variety's* Emmanuel T. Erediano, who does a great job in today's issue reporting on the powerpoint presentation on stranded whales and porpoises given Wednesday evening by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration marine mammal response coordinator David Schofield.

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And the opposite to the governor for his threatened veto of House Bill 16-47, which would ban smoking in all enclosed areas in the CNMI. Surely a

weird stance for a non-smoker? Does he not have any concern for the health of tourists (not to mention the health of local residents)?