

On My Mind
2/19/10

A corollary to last week's comment on the difficulty of cleaning up corruption in small places has to do with the fact that it generally takes outside (re)sources to do so, since outsiders aren't affected by the close relationships in small places. The column noted that even though the parties to corruption, nepotism, etc., may all be readily identifiable in a small place, nothing is done because no one wants to take action against his or her friend, family, neighbor.

In such small places, it generally requires investigation and prosecution by outside (federal) agents to bring transgressors to justice. As noted last week, the road would otherwise be much bumpier, reform much more difficult to achieve - being dependent on first reaching a "tipping point" among the affected parties. Given that outsiders/federal agents do not have unlimited resources, however, those agents are not going to rank small places very high on their list of priorities.

The irony is that to the small place, outside intervention is critical to reform; to the outsiders, the place is almost too small to worry about.

The challenge is how to reconcile the need for outside help with the outsiders' perspective that small places don't warrant all that much attention.

A challenge of a different sort is emerging in the Marpi area that underwent a "Brownfield" clearing last year. It's the same old island problem: dealing with invasive species. And it's come about because once again, unintended consequences were not adequately addressed.

For reasons that still seem somewhat dubious, the Department of Public Lands decided that the vegetated areas along the road leading up to Suicide Cliff were a safety hazard, and should be cleared so that the remaining World War II ordnance still buried there could be removed. With what now turns out to be far too little thought or planning, the area was stripped, most of the trees cut down, and, once the ordnance had been removed, the hill-sides re-seeded with ground cover and low shrubs.

Forget the habitat, the eco-systems that were destroyed. Forget the visual degradation. Forget the failure to return the area to its previous state. Thanks to all of the above, and then some, an invasive vine has now attacked the area, and in spots has already climbed some of the remaining trees. No one seems sure what the vine is. No thought given to bringing it under control. No concern expressed about its impact on the environment, on the tourists who pass it daily, on the shrinking population of colorful birds and other critters who used to live there.

Ironically, the cows that used to graze there were also banned to make way for the "Brownfield" clearing. Yet, we are told, those same cows would offer readily available, inexpensive, natural control of the invasive weed - as they eat it readily. However, the

cows in that area were being rustled, and bringing them back might require an increase in protective measures - more cowboys? more dogs? more patrols?

Both the Division of Parks and Recreation and NMC's Cooperative Research Extension/Education Service have been alerted to the problem.

The month-long series of lectures by Kenyon College's writer-in-residence Professor P. Fred Kluge has ended. According to Humanities Council personnel, the evaluation forms filled in by attendees unanimously gave Kluge's lectures the highest praise of any event ever sponsored by the Council.

Rightly so. The man is an excellent speaker. His knowledgeable of the subject is thorough, extensive. His enthusiasm is almost evangelical - indeed, Kluge told his audience that he "professes" literature, he is a professor of literature, that he believes reading to be a moral imperative. Literature, reading, opens readers to new worlds they might not ever see otherwise, exposes them to new ways of thinking they might not otherwise encounter, shows them new perspectives they might otherwise never consider, gives them new knowledge they might otherwise never acquire. It also provides a knowledge in common of history.

But does it matter what one reads? Yes and no. Almost anything one reads opens some doors. Obviously, the more one reads, the more imaginative and creative the piece, the better the writing, the more doors open.

Can the same thing be said of literature in its visual forms? And if movies, why not soaps and other tv offerings? A major difference: the visual forms leave far less to the reader's imagination. Printed literature allows the reader to envision whatever isn't spelled out. In its visual forms, there is no room for creativity to play a role.

As the campaign slogans go: Have you read a book today? Have you read to your child today? Have you given your child a book to read today? What with the JoeTen-Kiyu Public Library, the accessibility of books via the internet, and the presence of "Bookseller" - despite its limited offerings - the people of the CNMI should have no problem following Kluge's imperative.

Short takes:

A reader has come up with an even better use for that \$400,000 mentioned in last week's column as being slated to "enhance" Chalan Kanoa's round house: use it to purchase the decompression chamber for which the CHC Volunteers have been working so hard to raise funds. According to this reader, Chuuk, Palau and Guam all have decompression chambers - which have numerous medical applications as well as being used for SCUBA divers with the bends. Only the CNMI does not. Such a hyperbaric chamber on Saipan would attract the world class divers the CNMI does not now get, thus helping the economy. It would also help treat certain medical conditions related to diabetes, burns, open wounds, and cervical injuries.

*

Why is it surprising that in a bloated government, agencies within that government would also be bloated? Northern Marianas College, for example, with a total of 364 personnel (a workforce of 182, 76 staff, and 106 faculty), boasts a Staff Senate, a Faculty Senate, and what is slated to become the student senate (now the Associated Students of NMC), a Budget and Finance Committee, a College Council, and an Academic Council - each of whom no doubt has a separate set of officers, a separate budget, keeps separate ledgers, and files separate reports. Maybe it's the grandiosity of terms, (*three* Senates?) but sounds cumbersome to me.

*

Though the *Saipan Tribune* does report on restaurants on Saipan, it does so only on a paid basis. With the many tiny restaurants - some quite good - that are open on Saipan, it might be worth doing a restaurant corner as a regular news story, rather than an ad. (Len's, for example, in the J&P building on Beach Road, or Kuri Ya on Middle Road, come to mind.)

*

A new restaurant that seems to be doing quite well - and would hopefully have been covered in such a section in the paper - is Shenanigans, on Beach Road across the street and slightly south of Winchells in Garapan. Hours are 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 p.m. Mondays - Fridays; 7:30 a.m. - 11:00 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays.

*

Another item such a section might have covered is the re-opening of the Big Dipper. For those who haven't heard, it is now located next to the Saipan Gold Beach Hotel on Beach Road. Hours are from 12 noon to 9:00 p.m., seven days a week.