

1/13/12

A casual Google search shows that there doesn't seem to be any such thing as a National Reporter's Day, or National Journalist's Day, or even a National Newspaper Day, along the lines of National Secretary's Day, or National Boss' Day, or National Law Day, and the like. Come to think of it, there doesn't seem to be a national doctor's day, either. And while reporters and the newspapers they write for do have their flaws, they nonetheless deserve recognition for the significant role they play as information gatekeepers/gateways in the communities they serve. What reporters cover and what they don't, how they report what they do cover, which stories the papers choose for page one and which they bury inside, all affect how their readers see the world around them, how and what they think of it.

As an "armchair" columnist, I rely heavily on the newspapers for information - and they admittedly also influence my thinking, how I see the world around me. I'm often frustrated by the lack of some detail or other, or the lack of clarity here and there, but fortunately, it's usually possible to resolve the problem via phone call or e-mail. Overall, I find the papers more helpful than not.

For example, I had intended to write a diatribe about the odd financing provided for the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation - only \$5 million in seed money with no other source in sight - until it was revealed in the *Marianas Variety* just this past week that CHC expects to get fully 71% of its funding from federal sources, with another 15.7% from private insurance and self-paying patients.

I had been asking far and wide about new construction on Middle Road in Puerto Rico when lo and behold, there was a picture right on the front page of the *Saipan Tribune*, providing the answer.

The newspapers also provide insights into what else is out there - how others think, how they view the world around them - through the thought-provoking and sometimes provocative opinions of nationally syndicated columnists that appear on their op-ed pages. In addition, newspapers offer additional features, from crossword puzzles to lifestyle, from sports to comics - intended to appeal to their different audiences - but that's beyond the point.

Not that there should necessarily be yet another of those time-consuming and near-meaningless photo-op and declaration-signing ceremonies, but it does seem - despite their occasional shortcomings, oversight or downright errors - that reporters, who work hard and diligently, long hours and at the low end of the pay scale, deserve some sort of formal recognition for their contributions to the community.

(Disclaimer: I do not own a television set, and do not watch tv on my computer because I don't have the patience to put up with the many interrupting ads. Nor do I listen to radio - except for the local National Public Radio station. Thus the restriction to newspaper reporters. Though by extension, the same comments would apply to reporters in the other media.)

Having said all that, I could wish that the reporter - no disrespect intended, I hasten to add - who put together, with considerable effort, a story about which legislators authored how many bills that actually became law, pointing out that only one was revenue-generating - had instead focused on the fact that not one of the 66 bills that have become law was cost-cutting. In this

cash-strapped economy, cutting costs is far more effective - and therefore more significant - as a way to reduce the budget deficit than is trying to find new sources of revenue.....

Or I could wish that she had focused on the fact that of those 66 laws that were passed, 32 amend laws that are already on the books (which implies that perhaps those laws were not that well-written to begin with....). Or - which admittedly would have taken even more work - had focused on whose bills that became law were substantive, accomplished anything positive, as opposed to just counting numbers. This is not a case where quantity counts. It is quality that should be the issue. But one has to acknowledge that where reporters are under deadline pressure, there are limits to what they can do, accomplish. In fact, this reporter, on the whole, is particularly skilled, experienced.

I could also wish that searching local newspapers' archives were easier, more efficient - given that the papers do contain so much useful reference material. A book, "Getting Organized in the Google Area" by Douglas C. Merrill testifies to the importance of good searching programs. In fact, at one point he states that maintaining files in one's computer is no longer necessary, given the effectiveness of the search capability of Google on the web and Google-like desk-top search programs. (This may not be true for businesses, but Merrill is addressing individual computer users.) And it's true that some web searches do retrieve local newspaper articles. But it sure would be nice if one could search a smaller file, and come up with fewer, more relevant, hits than searching the web does.....

More on the mayor's prudent decision to no longer pay for picnic tables: When the government - be it the mayor's office, the municipal council or the legislature - provides picnic tables to the community it is "free of charge" - but not actually, since the cost of the tables themselves, of the workers who deliver them and pick them up (and their life insurance and their health insurance and their workman's compensation), and of the vehicles and fuel to deliver them, is all paid for by government - by the taxes everyone pays.

On the other hand, if providing those tables is privatized - provided by the private sector - it would create jobs for unemployed workers, and the costs involved would be paid only by those who actually use the tables. The rental company would pay taxes to the government, creating revenue, and the workers would spend their pay in the economy, which would bolster businesses, who also pay taxes to the government, thus generating even more revenue.

Government workers who lost their jobs as a consequence could start providing the same service - since it will still be needed - in the private sector, creating a win-win situation with government costs decreasing due to a smaller work force, and government revenue increasing due to increased private sector employment.

Short takes:

- Talking of cutting costs, another small measure the government could undertake would be to

re-paint all the government office buildings in Susupe with white paint to reflect the sunlight, cool the interior and reduce air conditioning use, thus cutting power costs.

- The coconut wireless has it that an attempt is underway to reconstitute the CNMI Democratic Party so that it may qualify to join the national Democratic Party in time for CNMI delegates to cast a vote for president at this fall's national convention. But given the discrepancies between the principles of the national party and those of local party members, that won't be easy. Too bad one can't formally establish an "old Democratic party" and a "new Democratic Party."

- The CNMI 2012 tide calendar is out! The very colorful production, put out cooperatively by the Division of Environmental Quality, the Coastal Management Office, and the Division of Fish and Wildlife, is available from the office of DEQ on Middle Road.

- The hearing on proposed CUC rate increases has been changed from January 21 to Wednesday, January 25, at 9:00 a.m. It will take place at the Retirement Fund Conference Room on Capitol Hill.

- Some dates to remember: **Monday, January 16, 4:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.**, Martin Luther King Day keynote address by visiting civil rights leader Dr. Amos C. Brown, at the American Memorial Park Visitor Center Theater; **Friday and Saturday, January 20 and 21 at 7:00 p.m.**, **Sunday, January 22 at 3:00 p.m.**, the Friends of the Arts production of "Miracle Worker"; **Friday, January 20**, opening of the Island Artist Exhibit in the Grand Hotel lobby.