

On My Mind  
2/16/07

According to a 3/08/06 news release from the California Department of Justice, settlement of a law suit filed by the California Attorney General against Pleasant Care Corporation calls for the payment of \$1 million in fines and immediate improvement of resident care at all 30 of its facilities in the state. The release can be found at < <http://ag.ca.gov/newsalerts/re-lease.php?id=1268> >.

Pleasant Care, the state's second largest provider of nursing home care in California, was sued for numerous allegations of elder abuse and criminally negligent care including more than 160 citations that the California Department of Health Care Services (DHS) has issued against Pleasant Care facilities across the state over the last five years for regulatory violations, the release states.

New charges, as recently as 01/29/07, have placed a Pacific Care facility, the Pacific Care Rehabilitation and Nursing Center in Santa Cruz, California, on a "National Home Nursing Watch List" for 29 violations on charges of "actual harm and /or immediate jeopardy," according to the web site < <http://www.memberofthefamily.net/watch/055017.htm> >.

Interestingly enough, the name of Sedy Demesa, executive vice president of Pleasant Day Corporation, does not appear in any of the stories, nor does a search of her name in Google, Yahoo, or ask.com reveal any connection between the tribulations of Pleasant Day Corporation and Sedy Demesa, though those searches show she is often cited for her political campaign contributions in California, as well as for her activities in the CNMI.

Demesa owns the weekly publication *Pacific Times* which appears in the CNMI, and is planning to open a nursing training program on Saipan within the next several months.

Credit for finding this story is not mine, it goes to a librarian friend (who has asked for anonymity) whose expertise as web-researcher I find phenomenal.

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An idea that is/was mine, but was recently elaborated on by someone else, has to do with finding other uses for the now empty garment factories and associated buildings. There's long been a need for a performing arts center on Saipan, and a friend suggested that perhaps one of the closed garment factories might lend itself to that purpose.

Of course, most of the factories are not in very desirable locations, but transforming one into a performing arts center might be a great way to rehabilitate a neighborhood. Even if in Lower Base - an area long abused, mis-used and under-used - placing an arts center there could work wonders for the entire area, and begin a process of revitalization as restaurants, souvenir shops, and related businesses opened around it.

The open floors of the factory would lend themselves to all sorts of stagings much more easily than the limited facilities now available on island, and still leave plenty of room for the storage of stage sets, costumes, equipment, etc. Nearby barracks could provide housing to off-island performers coming in to put on shows. With the building already in place, and presumably, utilities also in place, the costs of constructing a performing arts center would be greatly reduced, as would the time to get one operational.

There are apparently lease problems with making use of closed factories, but it becomes

clearer every day that the longer those facilities are left empty and unused, the greater the loss to the lessor, be s/he government or private. Aggressive action should be taken to resolve the issues so that such assets/resources - of which the CNMI is in dire need - can be made use of, can be used to generate revenue. It might behoove the legislature to consider whether it can play a role in facilitating the re-use of all those empty premises.

In fact, there's already one long-time resident who's said he would gladly manage the establishment and management of a performing arts center at no cost, should the CNMI establish one during his lifetime.

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A recent inspiring "performance," if you will, that left me frustrated, is that of Hilary Swank, star of the movie "Freedom Writers." She played a teacher who used non-traditional situation-based strategies to turn a mixed bunch of rowdy, rebellious, inner city teen-agers into a cohesive group of successful high-school students - making for a very heart-warming film. What left me frustrated and depressed is that despite a string of similar films, some also based on fact - as was this one - and despite their proven effectiveness, these "non-standard" approaches are still the exception rather than the rule.

Equally depressing is the fact that despite the recognition, in such films, of the importance of teachers to the development of students as productive members of society (as opposed to their becoming disgruntled drop-outs), society as a whole continues to do nothing to support them. Teachers are not given respect, they are not paid on a scale appropriate to their role in society, they are not given the tools, the staff, the materials to effect the miracles we expect of them.

It seems so simple. There are good teachers out there who know how to use their skills, creativity, imagination to arouse interest and enthusiasm in students, to motivate students to read and explore, to turn students from disinterested trouble-makers into eager learners. Their students finish high school, go on to college, raise the standard of living in their families, contribute to a productive economy. Everyone benefits.

Yet these accomplishments remain isolated incidents. Why is that? When will school officials, board of education members, legislators, civic and government leaders recognize that, simply put, you get what you pay for? That if teachers are not adequately, appropriately, remunerated, recognized, and supported, their product will most likely be inferior? With a rippling effect on all of society?

Nor is this an abstract problem. The situation exists here in the CNMI as well.

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Also disturbing is the information that the CNMI Department of Public Works has announced it is going ahead with the construction of the controversial Cross-Island road as well as the Talafofo Highway project, which would provide a paved road to Kalabera cave. (Next thing you know, they'll propose a mono-rail into the cave, to facilitate access.) Much of the impetus apparently derives from the fact that the U.S. Department of Transportation is threatening that if the CNMI does not use its highway funds it will lose them, and the DPW does not have any more appropriate road plans ready for implementation.

With the accompanying destruction of habitat and green areas, development of

homesteads, and inevitable commercial development, Saipan will have taken one more step towards its eventual total concretization, and the loss of its appeal to tourists.

There are many roads on Saipan that need paving - into Wireless Hill, for one, or up to Mt. Topachau for another - roads that already exist, roads that would directly benefit residents as well as tourists - that would not begin to cause the same kind of damage that these two roads will cause. Construction of Cross-island and Talafofo roads should wait at least until the Zoning Board's land use plan and the public land use plan also in preparation have been drawn up, so that they may more effectively be integrated into an over-all plan for the island. Isolated development of scattered sectors of the island are counter-productive.

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Short takes:

A bright note: A small new industry has been established on Saipan - it re-cycles used plastic bags into new ones. The old ones are cleaned, cut up, and melted, and new stronger ones created - bags that are being used by Beautify CNMI! in its clean-up drives. Jin Yong Plastics is located behind the Chalan Kanoa school. Owner/operator Jang has said he operates only two hours a day because he cannot afford the cost of power to run his equipment. Though I have not personally visited his outlet, those who have were impressed with its cleanliness, non-toxicity. According to one who visited, the site is the only one in the Pacific re-cycling used plastic bags. An as-yet unsung (and positive) distinction for the CNMI!

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A weird note: The *Pacific Daily News*, upon being requested to publish a letter honoring the memory of the late Ben Concepcion as the first certified local SCUBA instructor, so that his many Guam divers could learn of his passing, responded that it could not run the letter, "as an identical letter already has run in the *Marianas Variety*." As though the readership of both papers were identical! (Sort of high albeit left-handed praise for the Guam edition of the *Variety*! The note was signed by the *PDN*'s Editorial Editor and Copy Chief. I guess we're lucky that our two local papers don't have such an asinine policy.

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A sad note: For those who may not yet have heard, artist Doug Rankin passed away February 10<sup>th</sup> at the age of 61. He was best known for developing the unique art of banana painting. Mass of Christian Burial will be conducted on Tuesday, February 20, at 11 a.m. at Mt. Carmel Cathedral. Samples of his work are on exhibit at the CNMI Arts Council gallery on Capital Hill. The exhibit is open Mondays and non-austerity Fridays from 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. and Saturdays 9:00 a.m. - noon. It is closed on Sundays and holidays. The show will close March 3<sup>rd</sup>.

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Movies this week: 2 PG-13's, for a total of seven PG-13's and one R, or five comedies, two thrillers and one "musical drama."