

Majuro Chamber of Commerce
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Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, June 14, 2006

Marshall Islands Resort

Meeting called to order by President Jack Niedenthal at 12:01 P.M. Approximately 100 members and guests were in attendance. The next regular meeting will be on Wednesday, July 12, 2006.

- **Minutes** – approved electronically prior to meeting
- **Guests**
 1. Wilfred Kendall, Minister of Education
 2. Biram Stege, Secretary of Education
 3. Raynard Gideon, Commissioner, Public Service Commission
 4. Marie Maddison, National Training Council Director
 5. Brenda Maddison, Assistant Secretary of Education – Policy and Planning
 6. Richard Bruce, Assistant Secretary of Education – Administration and Logistics
 7. Allisan Nashian, Assistant Secretary of Education – Vocational Education
 8. Kanchi Hosia, Assistant Secretary of Education – Elementary Education
 9. Catalino Kitchener, Ministry of Education Budget Officer
 10. Chris Person, Ministry of Education IT Director
 11. Molly Kukera, Director, Teacher – Quality Enhancement and Professional Development
 12. Evelyn Konou, Delap Elementary School Principal

13. Juanita Rilometo, Science Curriculum Specialist
14. Clarence Saaud, National Vocational Training Institute Director
15. Mark Canney, Strategic Plan Consultant, former ADB Project Manager, and Jaliut High School Principal
16. Dennis McFarlan, veteran Jaliut High School teacher, and former Peace Corps

- **Financial** – Balance in the Chamber’s checking account is \$4759.15
- **Chamber President’s Remarks**

Kommolol Anij kin ien in. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize HE President Kessai H. Note, Hon. Minister Wilfred Kendall, Secretary of Education Biram Stege, other Honorable Ministers and Secretaries, Iroj, Alaps, government officials including members of the Public Service Commission, members of the Diplomatic Corps of the United States, Taiwan and Japan, other distinguished guests including educators, administrators, students and teachers from the various schools on island, the general public in attendance, and of course our Majuro Chamber of Commerce membership.

I would like to thank Minister Kendall and Secretary Stege for not only accepting an invitation to appear before the Chamber today, but also for bringing other members of their staff to help answer our questions.

An educator asked me the other day, after hearing about this forum, What can we do for the Chamber of Commerce? Before we begin our forum today, there is something I want all of you to consider as we discuss education here in the RMI: I would like to turn John F. Kennedy’s famous quote about government on its ear by saying this: Ask not what you can do for the Chamber of Commerce, but what can the Chamber of Commerce do for you and your organization? That is truly what the Chamber has set about trying to do this year. We want a higher profile in our community. We believe that in order to solve many of the complex situations that face our community today, it will take dialogue with our community to solve those problems, and the dialogue cannot be only those discussions we hear from the Nitijela floor for a couple of months out of the year. This is the Chamber’s second forum. We next hope to have a forum on health, and then later on a forum on solid waste. Perhaps next year the Chamber could be a forum for hosting some political debates as we are not affiliated with any political party. We have a wide array of expertise within our Chamber. We are bankers, lawyers, construction firms, retail stores, educators, and tourism industry professionals to name a few: We would like to offer that expertise to all of the schools in the RMI. If you or your school would like a speaker from the Chamber, please approach myself or another member of the Chamber and make your request, we would be happy to help you. And I would challenge you to get creative; let’s see what we can do to help each other to address some of our community’s needs.

Someone also asked me last week, Why is the Chamber of Commerce having a forum on Education? I can only say that education is an issue discussed constantly in our executive committee meetings. We need an educated workforce to build our economy, that's the bottom line. The countries that will be successful in the 21st century will be the ones with educated workforces. We have already seen this in larger nations like China and India where the economies are exploding because of what they can offer in the way of employable human resources. We need to consider this fact in the RMI, but educating and training a nation takes a lot of planning and effort to say the least. I would like to commend and thank Minister Kendall and Secretary Stege and their staff for all the work they have done over the past 5 or 6 years in trying to discover how our education system needs to be improved. The combination of MOE's testing of both students and teachers over the years and the numerous reports authored by outside professionals have given us a fairly accurate picture of where we are today with regard to education here in the RMI. This may sound very simplistic, but in order to solve a problem you first have to figure out what the problem truly is. I think it is a bit unfair that often times when someone figures out how deep the hole is, they get blamed for digging that hole. I think this has happened to a certain degree with the Minister and the Secretary of Education. They have brought out the World Teach and Dartmouth programs to help the RMI, and they have participated in many studies about the RMI education system to try to come to an understanding of our educational needs. I don't think anyone would disagree that the problems with our education system in the RMI are not recent; indeed, they have been with us for decades. But I believe at this point we have a better idea about what needs to get done. But the big question facing our nation is how do we accomplish this task? Well, that is one reason why we are all here today. Today we hope to begin a public discourse about what we should do in the attempt to make our young people smarter so they can grow to be better competitors in today's worldwide workforce. Again, however daunting this task may be, the Majuro Chamber of Commerce would very much like to be part of this process.

Again, I wish to thank you all very, very much for coming today.

- **Guest Speaker Opening Remarks – Minister Wilfred Kendall**

The Ministry of Education (MOE) is improved today with the advent of performance based budgeting. We have priorities, budgeting, and reporting. We have quality reports with 20 performance indicators. We have a new management information system. MOE has completed all reports required by the Amended Compact.

Today we fund kindergarten that was formerly Head Start. All 5 year olds are enrolled in kindergarten. We have a revised curriculum for elementary school. We have grades 3, 6, and 8 standardized student testing with assessment. All teachers and MOE employees have been tested. We are moving toward teacher certification.

We have some problems like English language proficiency. Some teachers can't speak English. We have a large geographic area in which our schools are placed.

I appreciate receiving the questions in advance, and I will ask my staff here to answer them.

- **Questions and Answers**

BUDGET/COMPACT FUNDING ISSUES

Q. What is the Ministry's budget, and where is the bulk of the money spent? What portion of the budget is Compact money?

A. Richard Bruce, Assistant Secretary of Education – Administration and Logistics. We have 27 million this year where 39% comes from the Amended Compact's base grant. This does not include the 12 million Amended Compact infrastructure funding. It does include 1 million in Ebeye "needs" funding and 5.9 million of the Supplemental Education Grant (SEG) that replaced Head Start, Workforce Improvement Act (WIA), etc.

Comment from the floor. US Ambassador Greta Morris supplied additional information regarding the Ebeye "needs" funding, Supplemental Education Grant, and infrastructure funding.

Q. CMI has been able to fast track funding for its facilities improvement projects because it has a comprehensive Facilities Master Plan. Does the Ministry of Education have a similar type of plan that charts the course for all the construction work that is needed to be done on its schools?

A. Tony Tomlinson, BECA, Project Unit Manager, RMI Public Works. Yes, there is a plan. The question implies an unfair comparison in that CMI funding actually preceded their plan. There are approximately 70 MOE sites. Approval is required from the Joint Economic Management and Financial Accountability Committee (JEMFAC). We've had a plan since 2003. Our priorities are: sufficient classrooms, maintenance issues, and a 50 million dollar outer islands maintenance backlog. Compact infrastructure funding comes in so-called trimesters (three-year periods). The first trimester is completed. The plan for the second trimester (2007-10) is completed, but the RMI government (not MOE) submits this plan to JEMFAC. The proposed plan includes Rairok Elementary School, Delap Elementary School, Ebeye Elementary School, and Laura High School. There are problems with leases and landowners.

Question from the floor. Neal Skinner, Owner, EZ-Price. How do we deal with lease and landowner problems?

A. Tony Tomlinson, BECA, Project Unit Manager, RMI Public Works. I refer these issues to MOE. MOE refers them to the RMI government.

Q. We notice that there is no provision for computer cabling in the new school buildings being built under the Compact funding. Is this an indication that computer literacy and proficiency is not a priority or plan of your administration?

A. Chris Person, Ministry of Education IT Director. No, it's a priority. There is no need now for wires. Wireless technology is the answer. And a wireless network is mobile. Electricity can be added later.

Q. How desirable is it for public education to have an underwater fiber optic cable connecting Majuro with the rest of the world? What are your plans to fully utilize this resource when it becomes available?

A. Chris Person, Ministry of Education IT Director. If this becomes available we will use it. But we are not sure if the Marshall Islands can afford their share given the existing NTA debt.

STUDENTS

Q. A high percentage of the students that graduate from the public high schools barely make it to credit level courses at CMI. Does the Ministry of Education have a comprehensive plan to address this problem? It obviously has enough resources. What is being done?

A. Allisan Nashian, Assistant Secretary of Education – Vocational Education. Yes, there is a plan. The primary school curriculum is done. We are working on the secondary school curriculum. We are developing standards and benchmarks. We're involving the private schools to obtain input. We are working with USP and CMI to make sure that our efforts are relevant. We're planning to do assessment testing of tenth and twelfth graders at the end of the year.

Question from the floor. Giff Johnson, Editor, Marshall Islands Journal. Can you give us some of the details? If the teachers are not qualified, can any curriculum do the job? Should the best teachers be in the primary grades?

A. Biram Stege, Secretary of Education. A lot of these questions overlap. Our answer to question 14 will answer this. For example, there is a pilot project this year called pre-Nine [intervention] where we work with the eighth graders before they enter grade nine. The law says that all children should go to school, but we're not there yet. We plan to look at all of the important grade transitions – grade school, middle school, high school and college. We don't have exit tests yet for grade twelve. Without such tests our high school teachers cannot be effectively evaluated.

Comment from the floor: John Tuthill, Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, CMI. 95% of the high school graduates here cannot be placed in CMI credit classes but must instead spend up to two years in remedial non-credit classes. There is no significant difference between the private and the public schools in this regard. This is not unique to the RMI. In the US as many as 70% of high school graduates are not passing junior college English and math entrance tests.

A. Allisan Nashian, Assistant Secretary of Education – Vocational Education. We have not had a curriculum for High School. We are now trying to develop a uniform curriculum.

Q. What is the Ministry doing about the truancy and drop out numbers?

A. Biram Stege, Secretary of Education. MOE has a new management information system. This will help us track students and get data to deal with this issue. The forms that we currently use are being revised. There was a recent study done about this problem in Majuro and Ebeye. This is being analyzed now.

Question from the floor. Scott Stege, Lawyer. In reference to the US program “No child left behind”, if a child drops out of school and stays out of school how can this child not be left behind?

A. Biram Stege, Secretary of Education. 90% of eighth graders are now going to either high school or vocational training.

A. Evelyn Konou, Principal Delap Elementary School. If a child doesn't come to school we try to call the parents if they have a telephone. When parents register children we ask for a telephone number or mailing address. If they don't have that we ask for the name of the weto where they live. Then we go to look for them. We have what we call a “special class.” We don't know what else to call it. When children in the age range of 9 – 13 years old come to us never having been in school, we place them in this class. I don't see a lunch program question from the Chamber. Some children don't come to school because they are hungry. The public schools don't have a lunch program.

Question from the floor. Liz Rodick, EZ-Price. Some of our employees, especially those with several children, tell us that they can't always afford the registration fee. Can this fee be waived?

A. Evelyn Konou, Principal Delap Elementary School. No. The schools use this for necessary expenditures such as small materials, other supplies, and gasoline.

Comment from the floor: Dr. Alex Pinano. There was a recent article in the Honolulu Advertiser about this problem. Hawaii has been able to solve part of this problem. Maybe this is something that we can do here. If we solve the problems in Kindergarten to grade 8, this will solve the high school dropout problem. [Chamber Secretary's note: The article that Dr. Pinano refers to is appended to these minutes]

Question from the floor. Karen Earnshaw, Cricket Correspondent, Marshall Islands Journal. We found 2 boys in Uliga who had never gone to school. Who is responsible to get these kids into school?

Answer from floor. Scott Stege, Lawyer. Anyone who comes in contact with a child out of school is responsible. S/he should identify the child to Ministry officials. All it takes to go to school is a pair of pants, two tee-shirts, and \$15.

Comment from the floor. Marie Maddison, National Training Council Director. The RMI is a young nation. Parents here are similarly inexperienced. It is the law that children

aged 4 to 18 should be in school. In our culture, the child is the center with the community encircling that child.

Question from the floor. Jerry Kramer, Owner, PII. It is very difficult to enforce the law. A food program is important to make school attractive. Are we eligible for USDA surplus food?

A. US Ambassador Greta Morris. USDA food is only available for the outer islands.

A. Tom Maus, US Embassy. In the late 1980's the school food program with USDA food was phased out.

Question from the floor. Jerry Kramer, Owner, PII. If the Chamber champions a public school lunch program will MOE object?

A. Wilfred Kendall, Minister of Education. No objection.

Comment from the floor. Dennis Alessio, Waan Aelon in Majel [Canoe project]. A recent study found that the most prevalent reason for school dropouts was nutrition. The second most prevalent reason was a requirement for babysitting.

Comment from the floor. Samuel Ngala, Teacher, Majuro SDA School. When I was teaching on the outer island of Ailinglaplap, I had to feed my students at my own expense so they would come to school. The Republic of China (Taiwan) then supplied free rice. That kept my expenses down.

Comment from the floor. ROC (Taiwan) Ambassador Lien-gene Chen. Taiwan donated surplus rice last year. The Marshall Islands Journal was critical. We are willing to do this again, but we don't want to offend either the private sector or the government.

Q. Given the alarming rate of teen pregnancies in the RMI, what is the Ministry's policy with regard to tuition for pregnant students, home study for new mothers, and what is the follow up to make sure that these students return to school to complete their educations? What is the Ministry's official position/policy as regards sex education in schools?

A. Juanita Rilometo, Science Curriculum Specialist. Sex education is a requirement for all schools in a manner consistent with Marshallese custom. Boys are separated from girls and taught by men while girls are taught by women. The MOE policy is that if a girl gets pregnant she can be excused for up to twenty days. MIHS has adopted a new policy. The girl is counseled and sent home to raise the baby for one year with an option to come back then. An outer island girl is sent to her home island for safety reasons. MOE doesn't have enough resources for home study, but we're looking into solutions such as working with WUTMI, PRELL, etc.

Question from the floor. Dr. Alex Pinano. Can MOE adopt a uniform policy for all schools?

Question from the floor. Nellie Yetton, teacher, National Vocational Training Institute. At what age do they start receiving sex education?

A. Juanita Rilometo, Science Curriculum Specialist. Grade 6 and up.

Question from the floor. Karen Earnshaw, Cricket Correspondent, Marshall Islands Journal. Please define twenty days.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Q. What's the status of the National Vocational Training Institute? Does it have any students, and what types of partnerships/collaborations have been established to better understand what types of trades/skills are required by the private sector?

Q. One of the key development strategies proposed in the METO 2000 report was to "ensure coordinated use of all available training resources to raise vocational skills to externally competitive levels." (a) What is MOE role with the National Training Council and the National Vocational Training Institute? (b) How does the MOE or the training institutes evaluate the quality of training provided to individuals and on what basis do we evaluate the training capacity of individuals to ensure it has reached international competitive levels? (c) What are the types of training offered by these two training institutes and is there a way of channeling trained individuals to work for the private sector and other government agencies?

A. Clarence Saad, National Vocational Training Institute Director. We've completed two full years. We have three tiers. Tier 1 is 9th and 10th grade academic remedial training and takes two years. Tier 2 is 11th and 12th grade academic remedial training and takes two years. Tier 3 is post secondary vocational training. This is for students that didn't make it to high school. We haven't started vocational training yet. Now it's English, math, and computers. We had 50 students to begin with. Then we had 90. Now we have 154. We expect to exceed 200 next year.

Question from the floor. Scott Stege, Lawyer. Who is eligible?

A. Clarence Saad, National Vocational Training Institute Director. Students who took the eighth grade test.

Question from the floor. Samuel Ngala, Teacher, Majuro SDA School. How will these students transfer credits to other schools?

A. Nellie Yetton, teacher, National Vocational Training Institute. We are teaching very basic skills and do not expect any transfers to other schools. However, we are using a criterion reference system that clearly shows what each student has learned.

Question from the floor. Jack Niedenthal, Bikini Liaison. What are the CMI entrance requirements?

Answer from the floor. John Tuthill, Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, CMI. We require a high school diploma or its equivalent.

Comments from the floor. Mark Canney, Strategic Plan Consultant, former ADB Project Manager, and Jaliut High School Principal. At the time that this program was started, CMI was going to offer certificate programs that these students could qualify for. The basic idea was to train these kids to be trainable.

Comments from the floor. Marie Maddison, National Training Council Director. We're trying to figure this out. Is the National Vocational Training Institute local or national? We are now studying all of this. We need a national human resource development plan. Now we have two sources of funding: non-resident workers' tax; and the Amended Compact Supplemental grant.

Q. Should CMI, USP or our high schools have a more or less vocational education emphasis?

Comments from the floor. John Tuthill, Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, CMI. We think that there should be more vocational training, but accreditation issues prevented this. We can't make what WASC would consider to be a substantive change until the WASC sanctions end. But we could do more with office skills and nursing certification. However, we have limits with our facilities. At present we have 650 regular students and 150 GED students. Our new campus will handle at maximum 1000 students. That only allows us to increase by 200 more students.

Comments from the floor. Irene Taafaki, Director, Majuro Branch of the University of the South Pacific (USP). We have some vocational certificates. We're now talking with the Fiji Institute of Technology that is interested in offering its courses through us. This summer we have 30 students taking an agricultural vocational course.

WASC/PRIVATE SCHOOL ISSUES

Q. Why has the aid-to-private-schools been so late this year (the second half of which was only received after school ended)? Is there a way that this aid can be given to the private schools before Christmas? And why aren't the WASC accredited schools given more aid because of their accreditation status? Wouldn't this provide an incentive for other schools to try to become accredited and thereby raise education standards in the RMI?

A. Biram Stege, Secretary of Education. Ask the Ministry of Finance. It is their responsibility to manage any disbursements that come out of the General Fund. Based on quarterly tax receipts, it is not possible for private schools to receive everything before Christmas. We increased the accreditation portion of a private school grant entitlement ranking from 2 to 8%.

Question from the floor. Samuel Ngala, Teacher, Majuro SDA School. How about other forms of accreditation?

ADB REPORTS/PSC ISSUES

Q. One of the key findings of the recent Jumemej Report mentioned that, "education outcomes remain poor despite increasing inputs. Recent analyses have illustrated serious deficiencies within the public education system that contribute to continued underperformance and poor educational attainment among Marshallese students. School enrollment, completion, and testing trends have not improved despite large amounts of resources invested in education". What are the measures taken by the MOE, if any, to alleviate or correct the deficiencies mentioned in the report?

Q. By any criterion, the educational system has failed the students of the RMI for many years (and thus created major problems for employers and the economy), across all three governments' administrations. Recent statistics, previously unavailable, have quantified the degree of the problem, although it has been known empirically for years, and analysis by outside experts state that the problem has been primarily administration, not funding. Students in the RMI are amongst the poorest-educated in the world, requiring employers to import qualified employees from elsewhere, depriving Marshallese of this employment. It seems the government is in denial of the extent of the problem, and even stated that the conclusions are wrong (although largely derived from the government's own records). Is there a plan, with dates ascribed, for the necessary steps to be taken to reform curricula, teacher competence and performance, attendance (both teacher and student), and resources (such as books)? If so, what is this timetable? if not, why not?

[Chamber Secretary's note: the above two questions were considered to be already answered]

Q. The ADB study showed wages paid above and below the Public Service Commission established rates. Many of those above were not only receiving higher pay than what is authorized, but they were not qualified for their positions. Many of those paid below the PSC established rates were qualified. Since the investigation has brought these discrepancies to your attention, what is being done to correct the situation?

A. Wilfred Kendall, Minister of Education. This happened before our time, and is not an issue now.

Information from the floor. Mark Canney, Strategic Plan Consultant, former ADB Project Manager, and Jaliut High School Principal. Years ago Ministry people were hired under the EPMS system. The Ministry then assigned all people to the Public Service (PSC) salary levels. Those whose salaries were too high did not have their salaries reduced. However, there would be no salary increases for them. Those whose salaries were too low were eligible for salary increases.

Information from the floor. Raynard Gideon, Commissioner, Public Service Commission. That is correct.

Q.. Should the PSC control teachers and employees of the Ministry? Or should your Ministry have the power to hire, fire and recruit the best teachers for the money? Have the salary disparities brought out in a recent report by the ADB been corrected?

A. Biram Stege, Secretary of Education. The Ministry of Education should have the authority. Based on my past experience where this was true, it was easier to manage. Now there are a lot of steps to go through to manage people. But constitutionally what we want is not possible now.

Comment from the floor. Dennis Alessio, Waan Aelon in Majel [Canoe project]. Something has to change. MOE has to have control.

Question from the floor. Jack Niedenthal, Bikini Liaison. [asked of PSC Commissioner Gideon] Can PSC be more cooperative?

A. Raynard Gideon, Commissioner, Public Service Commission. PSC has MOE and MOH. We don't hear this about MOH. I don't know. PSC supports the status quo.

A. Wilfred Kendall, Minister of Education. No objection. A few months ago there was a Cabinet paper to exempt MOE from PSC, but that didn't work. MOE is working with PSC to achieve more cooperation. We're looking at putting teachers on contract.

Comment from the floor. Marie Maddison, National Training Council Director. We need to flatten MOE management even down to the principal level.

18. The testing of teachers was done once (2004), and it sure looked useful for MOE and the public. But there's been nothing since then. When could we expect the next round of teacher testing?

A. Biram Stege, Secretary of Education. Yes, this will happen this summer. We are also testing all new hires.

Question from the floor. Kerry Earnshaw, Boat Person. If all children were put in school, would there be room.

A. Biram Stege, Secretary of Education. Probably not now.

Question from the floor. Bill Weza, General Manager, Marshall Islands Resort. With such a large MOE budget, why is the \$15 student registration fee going for supplies?

A. Biram Stege, Secretary of Education. This money stays in each school, and its use is reported to MOE.

A. Wilfred Kendall, Minister of Education. Past abuses have been punished.

Comment from the floor. Ben Graham, ADB Consultant. Forecasts for the future are now available. It looks like the future student population is shrinking.

Question from the floor. David Kupferman, CMI. Education has always occurred in the Marshall Islands. What we are talking about today is the schools. What do you want from the schools?

A. Wilfred Kendall, Minister of Education, read the MOE Mission Statement in answer to this question.

Question from the floor. Scott Stege, Lawyer. Where are the other aspects of public education such as music?

- **Chamber President's Closing Remarks**

I would like to thank everyone for attending today.

Old Business - none

New Business - none

Committee Reports

- **Government Relations** – Jerry Kramer
- **Business and Trade** – Neal Skinner
- **Financial Services** – Jim McLean
- **Tourism** – Delores deBrum Kattil for Bill Weza

**Majuro Chamber of Commerce
June 7, 2006
Tourism Report**

JAL

The MIVA plans to meet with President Note and Minister Zackios regarding their meeting with JAL Executives earlier this month. JAL has offered a timeline to the RMI Government to decide on this issue or else they will pull the plug on this project. Losing out on JAL will mean losing on one of the biggest opportunities to reach our shores in the past few years.

Air Nauru

In late May, Air Nauru informed the RMI that it will not resume its service to the islands. MIVA will do its share of seeking other possibilities to keep this route intact especially in consideration to our growing Australian market.

Urban Waste Management

There is currently a TA by the ADB for “Increasing Ownership of and Effective Demand for Improved Urban Waste Management” in the RMI conducted by Tim O’Meara, Ben Chutaro and Daniel Cramer. One of the main recommendations by the consultants is the establishment of an office/utility, which will be solely responsible and accountable agency for waste management here in the islands. MIVA fully supports this need and will recommend this as so to the Solid Waste Task Force.

Whaling in the RMI

MIVA received a number of emails from concerned people on and off island regarding the RMI joining the International Whaling Commission and the possibility of supporting Japan in their quest to lift the ban on commercial whaling, which was established by the IWC as a moratorium back in 1986. MIVA's Minister, the Honorable John Silk, will be attending the meeting in St. Kitts, Caribbean Islands. In full consideration to the future of tourism in the RMI and especially our oceans, MIVA wrote to the RMI Government to request for the RMI to discourage the lift as requested by Japan and support the global community in conserving the whales. Although no response has been received as of today, MIVA still requests the support of members of the community in this endeavor.

Upcoming Events and Activities:

- June 7-14 Photographer/Media Trip to Bikini - Eric Hanuaer
- June 9 – Tide Table Re-Opening
- June 12-18 – Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) in Majuro doing a show on tourism in the islands with a focus on Bikini and the affects of the nuclear age on the people and islands.
- June 23-24 PATA 4th Quarterly meeting to be held in Rota, Marianas Islands. (Loreen and Bill to attend)
- June 23-July 2 Micronesian Games in Saipan, Marianas Is.
- June Issue – Marine Diving Magazine (feature on RMI)
- July Issue – Travel Diver Magazine (feature on RMI)
- July/August Issue – Action Asia Magazine 10pg feature on Jaluit
- July 6-7 Micronesian President's Summit in Majuro
- July 7-8 Marshalls Billfish Club Annual Billfish Tournament

- **Transportation** – Salome Andrike
- **Communications** – David Strauss
- **Education** – Carlos Domnick
- **Health** – Dr. Alex Pinano
- **Environment** – Don Hess
- **Membership and Public Relations** – Liz Rodick

MAJURO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
Membership and PR Committee Report
June 13, 2006

Current Paid Membership: 39

The Chamber has four new members since last month and the following individuals and businesses have pledged to join:

Dennis Momotaro
Micronesian Homes International
Mobil Exxon
Monica's Restaurant

Moylan's Insurance
PII
WAM
WUTMI
Youth to Youth

MAJURO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
Membership @ 6/13/06

- 1 Air Marshall Islands
- 2 Allan Fowler
- 3 Ambassador Morris
- 4 Bako Divers
- 5 Bank of Guam
- 6 Bank of Marshall Islands
- 7 BCI (Ben Chutaro)
- 8 Ben Graham
- 9 Bikini Divers
- 10 College of the Marshall Islands x 2
- 11 Continental Airlines
- 12 Copy Master
- 13 Dar Sales & Services
- 14 David Strauss
- 15 Do It Best Hardware
- 16 EZ Price Mart
- 17 Harry Doulatram
- 18 Horizon Engineering
- 19 Isikeli Fotofili (Waratah Airconditioning)
- 20 Joemar Construction
- 21 Majuro Clinic
- 22 Majuro Motors
- 23 Marshall Energy Company
- 24 Marshall Islands Journal
- 25 Marshall Islands Mariculture Farm Inc.
- 26 Marshall Islands Resort
- 27 Marshall Islands Trust Company
- 28 Marshall Islands Visitor's Authority
- 29 Marshalls Broadcasting Company
- 30 Micronesia Sales Co.
- 31 Mico Beach Yacht Club
- 32 Nica Wase
- 33 Pacific Pure Water
- 34 Republic of China
- 35 Robert Pinho
- 36 Robert Reimers Enterprises
- 37 Thuy's Restaurant
- 38 TSL

- Special Projects – Sam Smith

Adopt a dumpster
Special Projects Committee Report

Preamble: In response to the growing problem with the deterioration of the dumpsters in Majuro and the resulting problems for the communities, there was a proposal in the Executive Committee to propose a program that was termed “Adopt a Dumpster”. Businesses and organizations will be encouraged to adopt a dumpster, repair it, paint it and continually maintain it. In return the business or organization will paint their name and/or logo on the dumpster along with that of MALGOV.

This is truly a community outreach project. We met the MALGOV Mayor and he approved the program both verbally and in writing. He indicated that MALGOV did not have the budget to repair the dumpsters. Coordination of this project was turned over to the Special Projects Committee of the EC and an ad hoc subcommittee was set up consisting of Sam Smith, Neal Skinner and Bill Weza.

Action: We initially have four organizations who immediately volunteered to adopt a dumpster: BOMI, MIR, EZ PRICE and YOUTH TO YOUTH. Instead of inviting the general membership and the community at large to jump into the project immediately, we decided that we would treat these 4 bins as a pilot project so we can give everyone a true picture of the cost, resources and etc. involved and we can report what will work and what will not work based on our experience in repairing these containers.

Partners: The Majuro Stevedore Company has volunteered to try to fix the first dumpster and the dumpster should have been delivered to their container yard on 6/16/06. Do It Best Hardware has volunteered to donate the paint and primer for the first four containers.

Projection: As soon as we successfully get these four dumpsters fixed-up, painted and in place, we will use them as a showpiece to encourage the general chamber membership and the community at large to “adopt a container”.

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 PM.

Minutes prepared by:

Jim McLean

Approved _____
Approved with Corrections _____

- Article referenced by Dr. Alex Pinano recently published in the Honolulu Advertiser reprinted without permission.

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NINTH GRADE — CROSSROADS IN THE CLASSROOM
Schools reach out to kids who 'can't fit'

Interviews with students in alternative programs

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As they walk through the door Paul Onishi hands each of his students a sharp, long-bladed knife.

"This is a deadly weapon," he tells them.

"Or you can use it to make \$35,000 a year."

It's the first day of Onishi's off-campus alternative cooking class for Farrington High students at risk of dropping out.

By the end of the day he has taught each of the kids how to wield a chef's knife and how to make chicken katsu. It's a path to the future for many of these young people, and the first day of what may become a success story.

"This program changed me a lot," says Ese Emosi, a 17-year-old sophomore who was majoring in cutting class before being arrested for truancy in a recent police sweep of beaches.

"It made me like to wake up and come to school."

As Hawai'i's public high schools see their latest crop of graduates proudly pick up diplomas this week, the state Department of Education is increasingly focusing on how to stem the tide of dropouts.

Nearly 15 percent of students statewide have been lost from every four-year high school class beginning with the Class of 2002. That's as many as 8,700 kids lost from the past five graduating classes if the rate holds this year.

In looking for answers, educators are paying particular attention to ninth grade. This is considered the most difficult transition year in the public education system, where problems emerge for many kids as they move to large, impersonal campuses.

In Hawai'i the number of ninth-graders failing their first year continues to climb, with more than three of every 10 freshmen failing at some schools. And that puts them at high risk of ever graduating, research shows.

From redesigning high schools to offering alternative classes and adult education programs, to working with community colleges to enroll at-risk students in job training programs, educators are struggling to find ways to keep students in school or bring them back.

Additionally, social service agencies such as Adult Friends for Youth, Parents and Children Together and the Samoan Service Providers Association are scooping up those who may have been out of school for several years, and giving them a renewed sense of hope that they can earn diplomas.

TAPPING KIDS' PASSIONS

"The conventional schooling system isn't for everyone," says Leusogafofoma'aitulagi "Bill" Emmsley, executive director of the Samoan Service Providers Association, which is also running competency-based diploma classes for dropouts. The program offers certificates based partially on life experience along with book learning.

"Those that have come to us have shared their sentiments that they'll never go back because they can't fit," Emmsley says. "We've got to make it creative and find that nerve that schools can't seem to touch. Otherwise we can write these kids off and someday they'll pop up at OCCC."

Princess Noa Palafu, 19, isn't going to let herself be written off. In training at the Samoan Service Providers Association office as a clerk/receptionist, she's also part of the way through the association's competency-based high school diploma classes. She expects to receive her diploma by the end of the year, and has taken it upon herself to pay off her parents' \$5,000 debt to the private school she used to attend before she was suspended for nonpayment of the tuition.

"It was just so much pressure," she says of the money issue that contributed to her dropping out. "I felt that was my bill and I wanted to help pay. My parents can't work because of disabilities and limited English."

After the suspension, she transferred to Farrington High and fell back in with friends who were disenchanted with school. Skipping class became a habit. By spring of her senior year she left school for good to look for a job.

As Palafu works to pay off the debt a little at a time each month from her wages of \$6.75 an hour, she's also proving she can handle a job. When she graduates, Emmsley hopes to offer her a full-time position.

"The diploma will give me pride and joy," she says. "It proves to other people if you're down and out there's a way to get back on your feet."

The urgency to find ways to stem the dropout problem is coming from the state's high school principals, who are attempting wholesale makeovers of their schools to make them especially relevant to ninth-graders. Already a dozen Hawai'i high schools have federal grants to create Small Learning Communities within their schools, defined as more

intimate groupings of students with their own teams of teachers to counteract the anonymity of large high schools.

"I know of no place that has all the answers," says national consultant Jim Parsley, who is assisting the schools. "It's the sum of the opportunities. The more opportunities, the more chance the kid has. And we're there to ignite the opportunities and unlock the passion in every kid."

What small learning communities are already seeing is success in reducing failure rates in ninth grade, along with an increase in assessment scores. But several more years will be needed to determine whether these changes will make a long-lasting difference.

"The first year of the grant we only focused on ninth-graders because that's such a critical year," says DOE grant coordinator Aileen Ah Yat. "In the first year there was improvement in the retention (failure) rate, and we even saw improvement in student grades."

BUILDING 'OHANA

At one of those schools, Kalaheo High in Kailua, principal James Schlosser is seeing dropout rates fall. Kalaheo's rates have gone from 25.4 percent in 2001 to 15.2 percent last year and Schlosser attributes some of that to closer tracking of at-risk students, more outreach to families and more options to make up credits.

This coming year his ninth-graders will be in a freshman "house" and teachers are getting ready for intensive summer training to make that happen. Schlosser hopes it will create an even more personalized learning community for his kids, and a better sense of identity.

"We do our best to create options so they can stay in school," he says. "Through the counselors we're working with families to help kids stay on track if they're wavering. Those efforts pay off."

At Campbell High in 'Ewa Beach, principal Gale Awakuni is seeing huge successes as a result of the more nurturing ninth-grade "house." From a ninth-grade failure rate five years ago of almost 50 percent, the school has seen it drop to less than 10 percent. As well, the school's dropout rates have declined significantly, from 14.7 percent for the Class of 2002 to 10.6 percent for the Class of 2005.

"I was shocked," Awakuni says. "I congratulated all our teachers. They've been working so hard."

SHOWING SOME CARE

At Farrington, the state's largest high school and one that logs some of the largest numbers of dropouts, that same personal intervention is the reason outreach counselor Jill Yoshimoto is knocking on the doors of Kalihi homes many times a month. She doesn't wait for students to disappear; she tracks them down.

Yoshimoto's job involves following about 110 kids on the cusp. They've failed a few classes and are increasingly on the verge of leaving for good.

"For some students we've been to the house two or three times a month," Yoshimoto says. "We talk to the parent, the student, talk about alternatives. We bring their current credits and sit down and say, 'This is what it's looking like as far as graduating.' "

With half a dozen alternative programs available through the school, kids can get a second chance. Paul Onishi's program, the "Spirit of Aloha Culinary Academy," partially financed by New Hope Christian Fellowship, is one of the newest alternatives but already has a waiting list.

A certified teacher and a chef, Onishi says schools must teach in a way that feels relevant to students addicted to a cell phone, iPod and Internet culture, who are posting fights online, cocking their baseball caps to the side with attitude and maybe flirting with gang membership.

"Usually these kids are looking for something to connect to," says Onishi, who builds self-esteem into the stir-fry. "And the interesting thing is the class bonds and becomes a family.

"There are different races, different age groups, different backgrounds, boys and girls, and they function as a group of people who enjoy each other's company. After awhile they kind of monitor each other. If one starts cutting and not coming, they say 'You better come because you'll get cut.' "

Onishi's class was the kind of welcoming space 17-year-old Taua "T.J." Olomua Jr. needed after his mother died this year and he lost interest in school, skipping so many classes he was about to be kicked out.

His mother had been the one waiting for him to walk through the door to hear about his day. If he didn't go to school, she told him, she'd send him to the Mainland. No one else could control him, he says.

But when Farrington suggested Onishi's cooking program, it caught his interest. "I'll graduate 2007," Olomua says. "I'm gonna come back."

Oriana Faasavalu, 18, is another of Onishi's success stories. Pregnant at 15, she gave up her child for adoption and moved to the Mainland, then returned to Hawai'i and tried to pick up her life again. Saying she's "not the school type," she nonetheless was a good student through eighth grade at UH Lab school.

In moving to Farrington for ninth grade, she figured she was so far ahead because of the private school that she could easily skip class and go to the mall.

"I thought it was a breeze. So when I went to class I was lost."

She was soon so far behind it was easier just to hit the mall and forget school altogether.

"People said I wouldn't make it because I got pregnant, but I wanted to show my mom and dad I could," she says. "They never gave up on me and always encouraged me that it was never too late."

HELPING KIDS CHANGE

Students want to change, says Deborah Spencer, who teaches competency-based diploma classes for the social service agency Adult Friends For Youth.

They also want more from life, she says.

"They just don't know how to go about getting it, so we provide that opportunity."

The agency works with groups of friends who are having problems, and finds that bringing them to class together is a powerful tool for change. "Because we work with everybody, they're all helping each other," Spencer says.

More than one student has found the strength to begin again because of the agency.

Seventeen-year-old Kathleen Dela Cruz, who got pregnant at 15 and dropped out of school, now has a good secretarial job and a stable family life because of the agency and their diploma classes.

"We struggled together," she says of the classes she and her boyfriend took to earn their diplomas. "I thought what will happen if my son grows up and I don't have the education to help him."

Student Lenelle Dungo, 19, said it was the help of counselor Terry Fisher at Adult Friends that made the difference.

"She just made me feel like she cared. Before, nobody cared for me, so I didn't care," Dungo says. "Terry kept telling me once I get my diploma that I'm capable of so much more."

DOSE OF NEW HOPE

Alternative programs have been the glue holding together many struggling teens' lives.

Renowned sociologist Emmy Werner, who has written books on at-risk students based on work done on Kaua'i, says alternatives are critical, and suggests American high schools might want to look at the European model.

"I just have this sense it must be a vacuum for so many, just sitting there, unless you're very self-motivated and have a good teacher," Werner says. "In that respect, the European system makes a lot of sense. They invest a lot in preschool, then they have these two tracks. If you want to go into the trades you can legitimately leave school at 14 and go into a trade school. Not everyone has to go through high school."

"That's the problem here. We don't have an alternative way of educating them if they drop out in the ninth grade, unless they go back later on and get a GED. So high schools need much more flexibility."

Werner also said there's hope for children from troubled homes.

"What we found (from research) on Kaua'i from kids who dropped out was once they got away from their dysfunctional family, they would eventually go back and it was usually to a community college or into the Army," she says. "You still get skills that are marketable but they won't have to sit through boring stuff they can't understand because they didn't learn to read."

Farrington High School principal Catherine Payne agrees that schools must offer alternatives. In addition to the programs her counselors offer, she's trying to work out a way to stagger the school day so students can choose to take classes until 6 p.m. to better accommodate their interests, or maybe even part-time jobs.

"How do you deal with 16- and 17-year-olds who have lost hope of graduating if you don't give them something that makes sense to them?" Payne says. "That's what we're trying to come up with."

"Society can't ignore these young people and say, 'If you can't fit in you're going to flunk out, and too bad for you.' "