

Marshall Islands Chamber of Commerce

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Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, August 9, 2006

Marshall Islands Resort

Meeting called to order by President Jack Niedenthal at 12:01 P.M. Approximately 40 members and guests were in attendance. The next regular meeting will be on Wednesday, September 13, 2006.

- **Minutes** – approved electronically prior to meeting
- **Guests**
 1. Bank of Guam (BOG) Bank Secrecy Act (BSA) Compliance Officer - introduced by Toni
 2. Dr. Tim O'Meara and Engineer Cramer, ADB - introduced by Ben
- **Financial** – \$3,924.39 balance in BOG
- **Chamber President's Remarks**

Shortly before all the proverbial crap hit the fan for the Majuro Chamber of Commerce and its president last month, Joe Murphy stopped me one day out in front of the post office, and remarked, "You know, Jack, your profile is getting to be a bit too high."

My initial reaction was to shrug my shoulders and keep walking... After a few steps, however, I stopped because it occurred to me that the guy who just spewed out that advice was the author of numerous island novels such as "Confessions of a Nice Bitch," and my personal favorite, "Retirement Plan: The True Story of the Death of Al Wong." That is when I thought--if only for a brief, fleeting moment--that maybe I should heed Joe's formidable words of caution. No, I then rationalized, this is the Marshall Islands, I have been out here for 25 years, what could possibly go wrong? How little do I sometimes know... After the awful experience at the Nitijela hearing last month (and the subsequent nightly overdoses of Advil), with a vengeance and with repetition Joe's words of warning came flooding back into my brain. I began to ponder, is Joe Murphy a prophet? And, maybe Joe Murphy is always right like he keeps telling us he is...

As things turned out, I wasn't the only one with a profile problem, and the Chamber was not the only organization on island that would come under government attack for expressing opinions. Over the past few weeks, our newspaper has been condemned by our political leaders on several occasions. The Journal was accused of libel and

threatened with a lawsuit by one senator after a story appeared in the Around Town column that it was rumored that the delegation that had traveled to the PRC had received a rather large sum of pocket money from their gracious hosts. In another instance, during the Nitijela hearing about the Chamber last month, when I was queried by a senator as to whether the Executive Committee had ever asked the President or the Foreign Minister about their opinions concerning the China trip, I responded, “No, we read of their opinions in the Journal.” The senator then got very upset, and asked, “Don’t you believe the Journal wouldn’t lie and make up stories?” Of course, without pause, I replied, “No.” Then, just yesterday, the Journal was attacked by the Nitijela for their front page story that proclaimed a potential split in the UDP--that everybody sort of knows is there at least in some form--as being false, and that it showed a certain level of irresponsible reporting.

So last night, as I sat in my little office at the house contemplating all the recent troubles being experienced by our comrades over at the Marshall Islands Journal, I realized that a picture I had hanging on my office wall shouldn’t really belong to me any more.

This is an original ink drawing by Charles Nelan, who lived from 1854 to 1904 and is credited with being the first syndicated cartoonist in the United States, meaning his cartoons were the first to appear in newspapers across the country and not just in his local paper in Cleveland, Ohio. This drawing is about 107 years old and was first published around 1899. Even though it was a gift from my mother, it has never really held any meaning for me. But I think it may have some meaning for our friends over at the Journal. It is a drawing of “The Office of the Fake Writer.” You can see the Long Arm of the Law reaching in to grab the writer away from his desk, which has four shelves of potential stories readied for publication that are categorized as Sensationalist Dreams, Fakes, Lies, and Libels. And the writer, of course, is in the process of writing a new “lie.” I hope our comrades at the Journal will proudly hang this cartoon in their place of business, and I hope that the Journal will still be around 107 years from now so that the citizens of the Marshall Islanders will still have a place to freely express their opinions each and every week.

- **Guest Speaker** – None

Committee Reports

- **Government Relations** – Jerry Kramer

Nothing new has been introduced yet in the session that just began this week.

- **Business and Trade** –Neal Skinner

- **Financial Services** – Jim McLean

- **Tourism** – Delores deBrum Kattil and Bill Weza

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Tourism Report

JAL

With the completion of the AKIA runway resurfacing project in the coming days, the MIVA will host another visit from JAL Executives from Japan and the U.S. in September to finalize preparations for the first charter flight, now scheduled for the end of December, pending the purchase of the needed ground service equipment. Members of the MIVA Board of Directors met with President Note early last week to discuss JAL and other opportunities for the RMI from our Japanese counterparts.

Pacific Explorer

Satoshi Yoshii, Marshalls Dive Adventures, expands his diving business by doing a coop with Pacific Explorer Fleets based in the Philippines, and welcomed the Pacific Explorer on Friday, August 4. The liveboard already has dive trips scheduled for the next few weeks visiting atolls such as Mili and Arno among others.

Statistics

As of June 30, 2006, the RMI welcomed approximately 2,573 total visitors, via air, with 487 holiday visitors (40 more than last year) and 1,018 business visitors (194 less than last year). Of the 487 holiday visitors, 220 or 45% were from Japan and 33% were from the U.S. or 163 total visitors. MIVA should be able to access the Border Management System for Immigrations and other visitor related statistics in the coming weeks.

Tourism Survey and Summit

In the next few weeks, the MIVA will be conducting a community based tourism survey as part of preparations for the upcoming RMI Tourism Summit, which is organized by the Marshall Islands Tourism Association and tentatively scheduled for September. These activities are part of ongoing assessments of tourism in the region as MIVA prepares to produce the Medium-Term Tourism Masterplan for the RMI.

Dry Dock

Now that the Taiwanese floating dry-dock is back on our government's table, a request has been made by various members of the community to come together to discuss ways to discourage this type of development in Majuro. This meeting is scheduled for Friday, August 11, 12PM at the Marshall Islands Resort's Enra Restaurant. The RMI EPA was supposed to hold a public hearing on Wednesday but has since postponed the meeting indefinitely. All interested community members are asked to participate.

Mayor's Meeting

The annual meeting of the Marshall Islands Mayor's Association kicks off this week with the Leadership Conference scheduled for today and tomorrow. As an agency for the Ministry of Resources and Development, MIVA has been asked to do presentation on tourism for the mayors. MIVA, instead of a presentation, will be asking the members of the association on what they're plans are as far as tourism development in the outer atolls, entry fees/permits, and AAA (airline, accommodations and activities) in their respective atolls.

Upcoming Events and Activities:

- September 1-2 All Micronesian Billfish Tournament
- September 1-2 PATA Micronesia Chapter meeting in Yap

- September 5-8 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat consultations on trade in goods and services in preparation for the Economic Partnership Act (EPA) with the EU.
 - September 18 Kwajalein Trade Fair
 - September Tourism Summit
 - September JAL Visit
 - September 21-25 Manit (Culture) Week
 - September 22-24 JATA Event
 - October 30 – November 4 WUTMI Annual Meeting and Handicraft Workshop – Traditional “Jaki” Weaving
- November 8-11 DEMA in Florida

- Transportation – Salome Andrike

The airport is continually dirty. There is a typical wait of up to one hour to go through Immigration and Customs. Often the Continental plane has departed while arriving passengers are still being processed. Airport maintenance staff adequately cleans the airport at the beginning of each day. However, Majuro residents waiting for arriving passengers make a real mess before they leave. This will be a problem for any JAL tourists who may come.

The runway paving project will be completed on September 4th. The runway itself has been paved, and only small tasks remain to be completed.

The summer Continental schedule will end on September 3rd.

- Communications – David Strauss

I discovered that my office telephones no longer work upon my return from vacation this week despite the fact that I prepaid for this service.

- Education – Carlos Domnick

Education Oral Report by Carlos Domnick, Education Committee Chair

1. Set of recommendations from Young Professionals Forum
 - Not too long, we (the Chamber) heard about a new initiative which is a first-of-its-kind symposium for young professionals to discuss issues such as the status of education, health, and private sector or economy and how the future will be affected if status quo remains. There are sets of recommendation that attendees proposed for education and these are available to anyone interested.
2. Education Consultation Workshops
 - The Ministry of Education just finished conducting a series of workshops in Ebeye, Majuro, and Jaluit. These workshops were aimed at understanding what stakeholders, which the private sector is a part of,

want for the education system and this information will help the Ministry draft their 5-year strategic plan for the next five years.

3. Principal's Institute

- The Ministry of Education just finished conducting a series of meeting for all principals in the public elementary and high schools. This was an effort to bring all the principals in one place so they can discuss their issues and find ways to improve educational services. We hope to receive some sort of a communiqué or report on the recently completed sets of meeting.

4. MoE Personnel Audit

- A performance audit conducted by the Asian Development Bank on Ministry of Education personnel just started last month. The Chamber is interested to receive the findings of this audit.

5. Public Accounts Committee's Oversight Hearing on Education: August 14, 2006

- The Nitijela Public Accounts Committee is planning to have the Oversight Hearing on Education on August 14, 2006. The venue is likely to be the Nitijela Conference Room and the time is yet to be determined. This hearing is open to public so Chamber members are encouraged to attend.

6. Update on CMI

- The CMI received its latest action letter from WASC on June 29, 2006. There are two eligibility requirements that are yet to be met and the college is making significant progress to address these requirements. CMI is expected to submit a focused midterm report on October 15, 2006 and expects a follow-up visit by WASC Evaluation Team sometime in mid-November.
- As part of CMI Lecture Series, the college will be having Dr. Dirk Ballendorf, Professor of History and Micronesian Studies at the Micronesian Area Research Center of University of Guam, give a presentation on the History of Educational Development in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. This will be given on Friday August 11, 2006 at 2:00pm at the CMI Main Conference Room. All are welcome and refreshments will be served.

- **Health** – Dr. Alex Pinano

The typhoid problem is now under control. In that this is an endemic problem in the Marshall Islands (it occurs naturally each year), the problem this year was that more cases than were expected occurred.

We have the “seatbelt sign” now, but we are having trouble finding a place to display it. National Police refused to allow us to display it there because the sign is too large.

- **Environment** – Don Hess

- **Membership and Public Relations** – Liz Rodick

We have 57 Chamber members now with commitments to join by 5 others. A current list of members is on each table.

- **Special Projects** – Sam Smith

The first “adopt a dumpster” has been refurbished by Majuro Stevedore and will be deployed near Marshall Islands Resort.

A return of insured, registered, and certified mail is presently being negotiated with the United States Postal Service (USPS).

- **Exploratory Committee for School Feeding** – Liz Rodick

We had our fourth meeting yesterday. There is a pending request for proposal (RFP) to supply at least part of the necessary food for the children. The Ministry of Education has located \$100,000 for this program. They are looking for additional funds because more money is needed. There are approximately 3,600 students in Majuro primary schools with an estimated 500 more who could be in school but aren't. We have \$2,000 available to do a height and weight survey for 5th graders.

- **Women's Affairs** – Carmen Bigler

Old Business – None

New Business

1. The Chamber Secretary will write a letter to Continental expressing the Chamber's desire to continue the direct flight from Guam. This represents an opportunity to increase tourism here. Salome will provide Jim with the name, address, and specific details of the flight in question.
2. The new weather station will have three towers each 40 foot high. There is no progress on lowering the NTA tower. Continental will lower its rates as soon as the NTA tower is shortened as promised by the Minister of Transportation.
3. On August 17th the new Matson ship will arrive in Majuro. The general public will be invited to a dockside inauguration ceremony.
4. A proposition was presented to the full membership to change the name of the Majuro Chamber of Commerce to the Marshall Islands Chamber of Commerce as

authorized by the bylaws. A majority of Chamber members present voted to make this change. This change in name is effective immediately.

5. A recent fire destroyed or damaged three of the five old generator sets at MEC. One of the damaged units will be repaired this month. MEC believes that the other two damaged units can not be repaired. The building housing these units was damaged. The entire MEC facility is insured for \$38 million dollars. There will be regular disruptions of electrical service now as necessary maintenance and distribution repairs are made until a sufficient number of these backup units are brought on line to be able to provide enough power for the island.
6. Ebeye is still rationing electricity at the rate of 4 hours on and 4 hours off. MEC staff are on Ebeye working to make necessary repairs. There is no indication of when the units that were shipped to Australia to be repaired will be returned to Ebeye. These units should have been repaired on Ebeye by technicians brought in from Australia.
7. The Solid Waste Taskforce needs final Chamber input this week. Accordingly, this week's Executive Committee meeting to be held on Friday, August 11th, will host Ben Chutaru, Dr. O'Meara, and Engineer Cramer to finalize Chamber input into this process.
8. There are approximately 5,000 tons of used asphalt available and being sold by Anderson Paving. This was the asphalt that was used to construct temporary ramps so that planes could continue to land following each night's paving.
9. There will be a classical piano concert in the Melele Room at the Marshall Islands Resort in September between the 18th and the 20th depending on the arrival of the musician. A concert grand piano will be brought into the room after one of the large windows is temporarily removed for that purpose.
10. The Chamber Executive Committee (EC) invited Mike Slinger to attend this week's meeting to discuss whether EC meetings should be open to regular Chamber members.
11. Mark Stege has resigned from the EPA Board to attend school for the next 2 ½ years. The Chamber needs to recommend another member.

Meeting adjourned at 1:30 PM.

Minutes prepared by:

Jim McLean

Approved _____

Approved with Corrections _____