

▶ SEE PAGE 11



**Back we go**

Tourism authorities off to expo

▶ PAGE 14



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Superstore opens in Airai

# mbj

## Marianas Business Journal

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### Weathering the storm Group deals with COVID

BY OYAOL NGIRAIKIL  
Journal Staff



Barabe

KOROR, Palau — What was supposed to be a year-long stay in Palau for Jeffrey T. Barabe and his wife, Kassi Berg, has expanded into a 20-year stint that includes a local production company and TV network, hotels and restaurants — all of which were impacted by COVID-19.

Their financial ventures include the Palau Central Hotel in downtown Koror from 2015, which has a welcoming gastropub called Canoe House Bar & Grill; the Carolines Resort in Meyuns, and from 2014 Elilai Seaside Dining in Ngerkebesang.

For Palau, the halt came in mid-2020 when then-President Tommy E. Remengesau Jr., closed the island nation to the world.

“Our operations were crushed by COVID-19 in the same ways as everyone else’s,” Barabe said. “Our hotel properties and restaurant had just gone through renovation and expansion and we were poised for a great 2020... then it all fell apart.”

Barabe said he and his partners “were determined to weather through the pandemic.

“We changed course early and

SEE WEATHERING ON PAGE 5

### Ticking the box Distributor turns to new field

BY MAUREEN N. MARATITA  
Journal Staff

Norman S. Yuen was known in the business community and to his friends as a distributor and retailer of appliances.

But after decades in the white goods industry, he decided to officially retire in 2014.

Yuen is now what’s known in the U.S. as an “encore entrepreneur” – a person aged 55-plus, who opens a small business.

Salut Guam which Yuen is launching this month will import and wholesale fine wines and spirits. But the small business didn’t

happen overnight.

Yuen’s love affair with wines didn’t begin well. “We had a distributor conference annually and wines were always served with each meal. I didn’t like wine at all at that time, because I thought wines tasted bitter,” he said.

Then Yuen sipped a German Riesling and “the fruity aromas” changed his mind about wine.

“I started feeling interested in different types of wines especially red. I started to wonder how the grapes after fermentation can turn into so many different combinations of

SEE TICKING ON PAGE 4

#### Kampai!



Photo by Julian Kyall

Toasting the United Airlines inaugural flight to Saipan from Tokyo were (from left) Gov. Ralph DLG. Torres; Steve Knode, deputy senior commercial officer at the U.S. embassy in Tokyo; and Toru Takahashi, managing director for Japan and Micronesia sales for United Airlines. The three were at the Aug. 31 launch party for the flight at the ANA InterContinental Hotel in Tokyo (See story on Page 22.)

▼ INDEX

PLAIN ENGLISH.....2

MARSHALL ISLANDS.....6, 10

JAPAN.....11, 22

EDITORIAL.....8

EDITORIAL CARTOONS.....8, 9

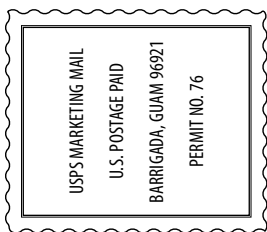
CORPORATE GIVING.....8, 9

QUOTABLE.....9

FOCUS.....12, 13

PALAU.....14

SAIPAN.....28



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# Travel and tourism, time to tango and taking COVID seriously

The news in this issue covers travel and tourism, new businesses and more. If there's an issue — whether it's the supply chain, or the rise in the cost of living — if we don't have a story on it, then somebody is commenting on how it affects their business.

And the pandemic's progress is part of our coverage too. ...

COVID-19 is still with us, and still affecting our business environment as we wonder whether visitors will travel on our new flights, or what will happen with those new flights in the coming months, and how the mix of our visitors will develop.

While tourism begins to return to the islands, I hear the concern from fellow executives for our employees — all of them are on what has become a continuing front line against the ongoing presence of this pandemic. ...

I have several doctors in my family. I would joke with my uncle — the liver specialist, that given

my fondness for a premium Scotch whisky or a glass of fine wine, his specialty might one day come in useful to me. (Not yet.)

My brother is a consultant and specialist in infectious diseases. On a visit to Guam years ago he took the time to lecture to health care professionals about Aids — then the focus of his specialty.

These days, the field of infectious diseases encompasses COVID-19.

I asked my brother at some point when positive spikes began again whether he thought there was still necessity for masks. ...

(If you ask a doctor (or an attorney) for advice, you get the answer



**PLAIN ENGLISH**

Maureen N. Maratita

you deserve, if not the answer you are hoping for.)

"It depends on your appetite for risk," my brother said. "And how seriously you are prepared to take COVID-19." Which I suppose is why in Guam on any given day — or at any event — you can see cloth masks, N95 masks, and no masks. ...

You can also still see masks under chins, dangling from lanyards and on wrists as people grapple with the etiquette of whether a mask is required. Depending on where you are reading this, you may be surprised that any of us are still wearing masks, or appalled that we are not. ...

I can hardly believe how many events we have on our event calendar. And the Guam business community has apparently decided its time to tango again. (There's a reason the other islands call Guam "the party island," and we might be getting our reputation back.)

Recent big parties in Guam sold out — for instance the Pink Ball, and the Make-a-Wish gala — and the Guam Chamber's upcoming gala sold out ages ago. ...

Judging by the photos I saw — some of you went to all the events, some of you went to some of the events, and some of you (maybe) went to none of them. ...

But if you are having a ribbon-cutting, a forum, (political or otherwise since we're in election season), a golf tournament — whatever it is, feel free to let us know.

The community events calendar is already stretching into next year. ...

— Maureen N. Maratita is the publisher at Glimpses Media. Publications at Glimpses Media include the Marianas Business Journal, MBJ Life, The Real Estate Journal, Guam Business Magazine, Beach Road Magazine, Buenas and Drive Guam.

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# Local company roars into world of electric motorcycles

**BY OYAOL NGIRAIRIKL**  
Journal Staff

With gas and power prices rising, Sun Energy Motors offers two-wheeled electric vehicle options residents may want to consider.

The Guam-based electric motorcycle company has a retail shop at the Franquez Building on Marine Corps Drive in Tamuning offering a series of Evoke Motorcycles. Sun Energy also has a service shop in Upper Tumon, near the Harmon Industrial Park entrance. The shop also has a range where people can test drive motorcycles, said Walter Ulloa, general manager.

The company opened its doors last year and Ulloa said they expect to hold their grand opening this fall.

Sun Motors is dealing with challenges caused by COVID-19 and other issues. Currently, the company is waiting on more electric motorcycles as well as helmets, gloves and other accessories to arrive.

“We’ve had supply chain issues, like many other businesses. But also, electric vehicles are so much in demand now, and anything that requires chips are being delayed,” Ulloa said. He said electric vehicles require more chips than typical gas-powered cars. “Also, batteries are in real demand, because everyone now wants to make electric vehicles.”

The delays are also exacerbated by the heatwave in China, as factories are only able to manufacture computer chips at certain times of the day when temperatures are below 40 degrees Celsius, he said.

In line with the grand opening, the company also will offer free motorcycle classes to help people get their motorcycle licenses. It will also partner with Guam Police Department officers to lead classes on motorcycle safety.

Ulloa said while Evoke Motorcycles — ranked third in the electric motorcycle market — is easier to drive than a typical motorcycle.

Based on the models the store will have available, residents can expect to spend about \$15,000 to \$16,000 for their motorcycles, Ulloa said.

“It’s going to have competitive prices,” he said, reiterating the growing popularity of electric vehicles in general, but also electric motorcycles in the United States. He said the two-wheeled electric vehicles have been popular in various Asian countries and have started catching on in North America.

“Anything electric vehicles is hot — whether it’s a motorcycle or light-duty electric car. Even medium and heavy-duty vehicles are getting higher in demand. That’s why there’s

a delay in the supplies, because of the increase,” he said.

Steady growth is expected to continue. Part of that growth, particularly with these products, is how easy it is to ride electric motorcycles, Ulloa said.

“I think you can find older rider and younger riders for our products because the lack of need to shift gears ... it’s easier to ride and so it’s much more accessible. As long as you know how to balance on a bike you can ride these,” he said.

Also, riders who are involved with power sports and taking their vehicles out to the track or dirt trails



Photo by Maureen N. Maratita

James McIntyre, sales manager for Sun Energy Motors; and Walter Ulloa, general manager for Sun Motors, with an Evoke electric motorcycle at the Aug. 17 7th Assembly of Planners Symposium at the Dusit Thani Guam Resort.

SEE LOCAL ON PAGE 27

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**TICKING**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

aromas and tastes. I thought that was fun and mysterious.”

Yuen developed not only an interest in wine, but his palate. With a property and children and grandchildren in California, annual visits there allowed him to pursue what at the time was still a hobby. Still, he began attending wine conferences and developing relationships as a customer.

“In 2018 I started going deeper asking about a distributorship to Guam,” he said. The timing was not good as fires in California decimated wineries and affected their output in 2020 and 2021. “Then we had the pandemic,” Yuen said.

But he achieved his goal and is now a licensed importer and wholesaler.

While he can import from anywhere, he said, “My focus now is California.”

Guam has several well-established alcoholic beverage wholesalers, and wine to suit a variety of preferences has become a staple at any island supermarket and gas stations.

However, Yuen said, he is concentrating on a particular niche market.

“I don’t want to sell a \$10 bot-

tle. I’m after quality and I’m trying to bring in something that’s not available.”

Those visits to California led to the establishment of relationships with wineries which similarly service the higher end of the market.

Yuen is importing from Amuse Bouche and Shafer wineries in the Napa Valley, as well as the Jonata winery in the Santa Ynez Valley and the Hilt Estate in Sta. Rita Hills Valley.

“I believe people who enjoy wines know that Heidi Barrett was the first winemaker for Screaming Eagle,” he said. Yuen who also collects wines and spirits said, “A 1992 Screaming Eagle was auctioned for \$500,000 for a magnum size bottle. Today a 750 ml bottle of Screaming Eagle could easily be sold for \$4,000 if you could find one.”

Heidi Barrett is the winemaker for Amuse Bouche. “So, we can try the wines she makes for a more affordable price,” he said. Amuse Bouche is a red blend in the Pomerol style, which retails for \$225 to \$275 in the U.S. mainland.

Shafer is a historic winery and the owners of Jonata and the Hilt Estate also own Screaming Eagle. “Definitely they know how to make good wine and I am happy to introduce those wines to

Guam,” Yuen said.

The first shipment of three pallets will be of various wines in small quantities, Yuen said. They are mostly reds with some white wine and will include cabernet sauvignon, merlot, chardonnay, and sauvignon blanc. “For some of them, there will be only a few cases,” he said.

Salut Guam’s wines will range from under \$100 to \$500. “It’s a premium product for serious wine lovers,” Yuen said.

He still intends to develop his interest in wine further, he said. “I would like to continue to learn more about how to find wine for people who are wine lovers.”

In addition to wine, Yuen is also bringing in a range of wine cellar climate control systems the VinoPRO range. “I have a 40-foot container of eight different sizes,” he said. The selection can hold from 15 to 194 bottles, he said.

Yuen held the distributorships for Hotpoint and Westinghouse brands, beginning his wholesale and retail businesses in the 1980s.

He and his wife, Julie, arrived in Guam from Vietnam in 1979 as refugees and after their second attempt to leave Vietnam by boat. The teenagers were married in Guam. Yuen has been an active member of the community and



Photo by Maureen N. Moraitis

Norman S. Yuen is shown with two of the bottles of Amuse Bouche from his collection.

is a past president of the Chinese School of Guam.

“Guam is a beautiful island,” he said. “I feel so fortunate to have lived here for 40-plus years.” **mbj**

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## WEATHERING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

quickly. We focused on the local market and as other businesses began to close, we heartily welcomed their former customers. The Palau government and U.S. government also helped out for a time by supplementing employee payrolls," Barabe said.

"We got really creative, designing theme parties, movie nights, dart competitions, live music jam sessions — you name it, we tried it."

These efforts allowed them to keep their employees on payroll throughout the pandemic. That wasn't the situation for many others employed in the private sector.

But for Barabe and his partners, it was important to dig deep and make it happen.

"We made a commitment to Palau and that meant in both the good times and bad times. We wanted to demonstrate our commitment by pushing through the downturn with the community and also wanted to be ready when the market rebounded," he said. "We also wanted to keep all the great employees we had trained over the years. There was a financial commitment — but in the end we were able to continue operations and able to fully operate as business begins to rebound. It just made sense."

Palau saw its first COVID-19 cases in August 2021, shortly after allowing regular commercial airline flights to and from Guam resumed. The country re-opened slowly, starting with U.S. military in 2020. Official tourism flights started April 1, 2021, through a "travel bubble" with Taipei. There were twice-weekly roundtrip flights, carrying up to 100 passengers per flight. Seven weeks and about 300 passengers later, the travel bubble ended due to a spike of COVID-19 cases in Taipei. In May 2021, Palau opened its borders to fully vaccinated travelers.

And while tourism numbers are still just a fraction of what they were pre-COVID-19, the Palau Visitors Bureau has noted an increase in tourism numbers.

In July 2019, prior to COVID-19, Palau welcomed 7,084 visitors, according to the Palau Visitors Authority. In July 2020, that dropped to 20. In July 2021, it was 293. And in that same month in 2022, there were 1,113.

The increased visitor arrival numbers in 2022 were boosted enormously by U.S. military personnel participating in strategic military exercises, including Valiant Shield 2022 and the first-ever Patriot missile live-fire exercise in June.

"The U.S. government and military and visiting dignitaries have injected much needed revenue into the hotels, restaurants, tour companies, and stores all around

Palau. Talk in town now regularly includes discussion of the next military exercise or port call," Barabe said.

Additionally, there's been discussion between Palau and partners in Asia on the return of direct flights that would help further boost much-needed tourism.

Barabe said they've seen the boost in tourism over the last year, but Palau, he said, is "not in post-COVID-19 yet."

"The bottom line is that the flight routes to Palau have not yet resumed, so getting to Palau remains very difficult. The rising costs of fuel, inflation and the new VAT tax regime are also making Palau more expensive than other regional destinations, so we are still struggling to recover. The 2023 season looks encouraging, but our projections still show a fraction of



Photo courtesy of Palau Central Hotel

**The Canoe House Bar & Grill is a gastropub attached to the Palau Central Hotel.**

the 2019 numbers," he said.

As to how their story began, Barabe traveled to Palau with Berg, who initially took a job with the government of Palau.

"My background was in the movie business, and I saw an opportunity

to set up a local production company (to) develop Pacific Islands content. That's really how it all began," Barabe said. "Twenty years later, Roll 'em Productions is still involved in

SEE WEATHERING ON PAGE 6



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## Business rebounds as the Marshalls sees big drop in COVID cases

BY GIFF JOHNSON

Marshall Islands Correspondent

MAJURO, Marshall Islands — Businesses in Majuro were battered during the first two weeks of the country's first-ever COVID-19 outbreak in mid-August, with multiple private sector companies reducing hours or temporarily closing because of the high rate among employees. But the surge in positive cases, while explosive, was short-lived, and by Aug. 22 — the start of the third week of the outbreak — most business operations had regularized.

Dr. Richard Brostrom, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control Field Medical Officer, who joined a medical surge support team to assist the Ministry of Health and Human Services during the outbreak, said the country saw a five-day surge in cases, a further five days at the peak number, and then a dramatic drop in the number of cases. Brostrom has been engaged in the response to COVID-19 in all U.S.-affiliated islands, including most recently in Pohnpei and Kosrae.

Omicron BA.5 was COVID-19 on steroids. In two weeks, more than 13,000 people were confirmed positive — 30% of the total estimated population of 42,000. But despite



Bank of Guam opened full hours in week three of the COVID-19 outbreak, but saw long lines.

more than 200 of its staff testing positive in the first week of the outbreak, the readiness of the health ministry was called "unprecedented" by Brostrom.

He praised the quick set up of alternative care sites in the community that provided services to thousands of residents. The widespread use of PaxLovid has also reduced hospital admissions and deaths.

A total of 16 people died through Aug. 28, but most of those were dead on arrival at Majuro or Ebeye hospitals and did not seek or receive medical attention. Because of the DOAs, health authorities added mobile teams that went house-to-house

to test and treat residents in Majuro and Ebeye. The virus also spread to at least nine of the remote outer islands and the ministry dispatched medical teams to each island to provide services.

After experiencing closure for two days, reduced hours and long lines of customers during the week of Aug. 15, Bank of Guam returned to regular hours of service from Aug. 22 as its staff returned to work. "We have full staff," Bank of Guam Branch Manager Matthew Cruz said as bank operations normalized.

The first two weeks after the

SEE REBOUNDS ON PAGE 10

## WEATHERING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

local and international productions, and Oceania Television Network is still broadcasting."

Berg opened her own law firm — The Pacific Development Law Group — in partnership in 2014. Barabe started what became a series of investments in the tourism and hospitality sector.

"Each opportunity led to other opportunities. The process of investing in Palau has been really organic," he said.

"Palau is gorgeous and a great place to live and explore. We wanted to participate in its development. Low taxes, affordable labor, and limited roadblocks made Palau an inspiring place to invest."

There are other investment projects still in the early stages of development, Barabe said.

He said anyone interested in investing in Palau would be wise to remember, "Provide excellence in whatever you endeavor."

"Excellence is recognized everywhere, including Palau. Do your homework. Palau has a kaleidoscope of opportunities, but each comes with a unique set of challenges. Participate in the local and business community if you want to succeed; Palau holds all of the complexity of a large nation packed into a small island nation," he said. "Spend some time here, chat with the locals — and have a drink at the Canoe House." **mbj**

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# EDITORIAL

## Take the opportunity

Here in the islands, we see those seeking office everywhere — at parties, funerals, walking or exercising, shopping, waving from the roadside — and at debates and forums.

Though candidates should be allowed to deal with the minutia of their own daily life, in many settings, your candidates are eager to hear your opinions and your questions — and if they are not, that's a problem.

But it's really their answers that matter.

Perennial concerns remain the same. Think health care and taxes.

In 2022, voters are concerned about wages — whether they are an employer or an employee.

Voters are concerned about the rise in the cost of living, whether they are a business juggling the increase in expenses, or a resident experiencing sticker shock in the market or supermarket.

Voters are concerned about tourism and whether it will return and if so, how quickly.

Everybody is concerned that our islands are safe places to live.

Dealing with constituent issues is not easy, though two-year terms should be enough for legislators to be accustomed to speaking with a variety of people, since they do so at bill hearings, at events and to the media.

The least you can expect is that an official has some point of view on the issues of the day. The most is that his or her opinion resonates with your own.

There are some issues where officials vote along party lines, and some where they do not - showing they are capable of independent thought.

In the runup to the general elections, the Journal encourages you to take an opportunity to attend a forum, debate, or pocket meeting in your community.

Sometimes the topics of the questions posed by a moderator are predictable and sometimes they are not. But typically, some and hopefully many of the answers will be on issues that concern you — especially as you head to the polls.

Read a paper. Listen to the radio. Watch TV or YouTube. Take the opportunity to form your own opinion. **mbj**

# CORPORATE GIVING



Photo courtesy of Naval Base Guam Chapel

Personnel from the U.S. Naval Base Guam Chapel delivered 150 bags — or approximately 1,000 pounds of food items — to the Hågat Mayor's office.

Personnel from the U.S. Naval Base Guam Chapel also delivered about 400 pounds of food items to the Santa Rita-Sumai Mayor's Office.

The food items were collected through the 2022 Feds Feed Families Campaign, with most of the food donated from food bags sold at Orote Commissary.



Photo courtesy of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

(From left) Elder Joseph Green and Sister Constance Green, both of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints humanitarian and communications missionaries; Koror branch president EJ Ozu, president of the Koror branch of the LDS; Palau Minister of Health Gaafar Uherbelau; LDS Welfare & Self-Reliance Manager William H.K. Davis, welfare and self-reliance manager of the LDS; and Ernest Simer representing his wife Wilma Simer, who is the first LDS wheelchair recipient in Palau.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints donated 124 wheelchairs to Palau at the Belau National Hospital. In consideration of environmental conditions

in Palau, the wheelchairs have composite spokes that won't rust, tubeless tires, and a seat cushion for comfort. The wheelchairs will support inpatients and outpatients

in the hospital, clinics in the area, and will be donated to patients in need in the community.

The Hotel Association of the Northern Mariana Islands has announced the following support for the 20th Annual HANMI Charity Classic Golf Tournament in September:

Atkins Kroll Saipan has donated a 2022 Toyota Tacoma TRD Sport for a hole-in-one prize; Marianas Health Services donat-

ed \$1,000 as a SuperiorsSponsor; TakeCare Insurance donated \$750 as a Superior sponsor. Chong's Corp. has donated \$500 as a VIP sponsor. DPA Cart Mart has donated a \$700 golf bag for the event raffle.

Mobil Oil Guam Inc. donated \$3,000 to support Guam Crime Stoppers.

Docomo Pacific donated \$2,500 to the American Cancer Society in support of the 2022 Relay for Life of Guam.

Dusit Guam's Employee Engagement Committee organized a donation drive to benefit foster children at Harvest House

SEE CORPORATE ON PAGE 9





# COMMENTARY

## QUOTABLE

**“Teppanyaki is not only cooking — it’s entertaining.”**

— **Chef Yuzuru Okamoto**, of the RIHGA Royal Laguna Guam Resort’s President (Nippon) restaurant. He was speaking with the Journal at an Aug. 29 menu tasting for select media. The Chef’s Table with Chef Okamoto offers one group per night a multi-course menu and private dining. See “The Dish” on Page 29.



Photo courtesy of Guahan Sustainable Culture

(From left) **Kristin Oberiano**, board Member; **Marlyn Oberiano**, co-founder and vice president, both from **Guahan Sustainable Culture**; **Chao (Grace) Shane Chang**, scholarship recipient; and **Michelle Crisostomo**, owner of **GUHydro** and **Tiny Greens Guam**, co-founder and president of **Guahan Sustainable Culture**.

**Guahan Sustainable Culture** awarded its second year Sustainable Futures Scholarship of \$1,000 to St. John’s School senior **Chao (Grace) Shane Chang**.

GSC’s scholarship program recognizes students who have helped the organization work towards its mission for a more food sovereign Guahan and are committed to working for a more just, equitable, and environmentally sustainable world.



Photo courtesy of Community First Guam Federal Credit Union

(From left) **Joyce Padua**, manager, **Tamuning Service Center**; **Patricia Tenorio**, consumer credit officer; **Alyssa Diaz**, mortgage loan originator; **Gerard A. Cruz**, president and CEO; **Chona Atalig**, assistant vice president/ compliance manager; **Donna Aguon**, senior mortgage underwriter; **Terese Salumbides**, vice president/ chief credit risk officer; **Neo Pangilinan**, officer trainee; **Nathaniel Dela Cruz**, officer trainee; **Peter Palomo**, senior vice president/ technology manager; **Georgette Ulloa**, credit counselor; **Ashley Arceo**, assistant vice president/ credit counseling manager; **Marylou Aguon**, loan servicing technician II; and **Evangeline Muña**, loan servicing manager.

**Community First Guam Federal Credit Union** is undertaking 60 Acts of Community as a community initiative in celebration of its 60th Anniversary.

Community First held a clean-up in Hagåtña, where Community First is constructing its new Hagåtña headquarters. Teams from each of the Member Service Centers in Hagåtña, Tamuning, Mangilao, and Dededo joined the Hagåtña clean-up.

The credit union is currently holding a supply drive for Harvest House as part of its initiative.

## CORPORATE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

and Alee Shelter of Guam.

**Employees of the Dusit Thani Guam Resort, the Dusit Beach Resort Guam and The Plaza** donated items of more \$600, which included backpacks, school supplies, water bottles and clothing.

**The Guam Chamber of Commerce’s Guam Young Professionals** held a roadside clean-up in Hagåtña.

**Rocky Mountain Precast LLC** donated the kneeling widow three-

ton pedestal for the Gold Star Family Memorial in Guam.

**GTA** supported the Gold Star Family Memorial project in Guam through in-kind and monetary donations.

**Black Construction Corp. and Morrico Equipment** were among other companies that assisted with the Gold Star Family Memorial.

The **Gold Star Families Memorial Monument in Guam** pays tribute to the families of fallen service personnel from Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia.

**Chef Kotwal Singh, Café Kebab & Curry and Sizzle Grill** donated 60 meals to Kamalen Karidat.

**U.S. Navy sailors and Guam residents** volunteered to clean the Korean Air Flight 801 crash monument in preparation for the 25th anniversary memorial service at Nimitz Hill.

**Atkins Kroll Inc.** organized a backpack drive for children at Harvest House, with all AK departments collecting school supplies and clothing during July and August.

**Triple J Enterprises Inc., K&K Island Pride Supermarket, Do it Best, Majuro Hardware and Pinho companies** donated cases of apples and oranges for patients and staff at COVID-19 care sites in Majuro.

The **Republic of China Taiwan** donated 5,500 Protective Gowns, 7,000 Masks, 2,500 soap bars, and hygiene products in support of COVID-19 efforts in Majuro from Taiwan’s embassy and community partners **Formosa Supermarket, Cost Price Supermarket, Home Garden Corp., Misco Market, and True Value.** **mbj**



# CDC gives Marshall Islands an A for country's COVID management

BY GIFF JOHNSON

Marshall Islands Correspondent

MAJURO, Marshall Islands — “The Marshall Islands has exceeded most expectations to deliver testing and treatment for large numbers of people, and to provide care for those with COVID-19,” said Dr. Richard Brostrom before he departed Majuro on Aug. 24.

Brostrom, field medical officer of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control Field Medical Officer who joined a medical surge support team in the country, was most recently in Kosrae and Pohnpei assisting the

Federated States of Micronesia's efforts to mitigate its first COVID-19 outbreak, which started in July.

Showing the Omicron variant BA.5's speed of spread — Johns Hopkins University — which tracks COVID-19 cases globally, reported that the Marshall Islands set a seven-day all-time record for the rate of positive cases, with more than 30,000 cases per one million population.



Niedenthal

“But what [the Johns Hopkins data] also shows is a jurisdiction that is able to test, treat and provide access to healthcare,” Brostrom said. “BA.5 will behave the same everywhere,” he said, making the point that the key was preparedness. “The Marshall Islands had access points (for people to get tested and treated), it was prepared, and it handled thousands of people in a short period of time.”

Jack Niedenthal, secretary of Health and Human Services for the Marshalls, said, “As this current outbreak of COVID-19 begins to

SEE CDC ON PAGE 25

## REBOUNDS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

outbreak was confirmed Aug. 8, many businesses were operating on skeleton crews. At Formosa Supermarket's main store all its cashiers were out due to COVID-19, so managers handled those duties.

At Micronitor News and Printing Co., almost three quarters of workers were out of action the week of Aug. 22, while the newspaper fielded two of a normal staff of seven on its production day during the outbreak's second week. The following day, not a single Marshall Islands Journal worker was left to staff the office.

All gas stations closed earlier than usual several days during the second week for lack of workers.

The staff shortage was so acute at the Majuro hospital that Health Secretary Jack Niedenthal issued a memo a week into the outbreak, reducing sick leave from five to two days for workers sick from COVID-19, and said those with mild symptoms would be put back on jobs appropriate to their condition. Niedenthal said he'd caught some flack on social media for this decision, but said that without healthcare workers there would be no healthcare.

The Post Office shut its two satellite offices in Majuro when most of its staff were also out.

At EZ Price Mart, Manager Liz Rodick said during the second week of the outbreak, “We estimate that half, or maybe less, of our employees are coming to work.”

But by Aug. 22, a sharp drop in positive cases was obvious. Even with community alternative care sites open regular hours, numbers dropped from nearly a 1,000 per day into the low hundreds. By Aug. 26, the numbers were in the low double digits per day. On Aug. 28, the ministry announced it would close many community sites and was going to review the initial decision to close schools for two months, to get students back to class in early September.

The largest retail supermarket, K&K Island Pride, managed to maintain nearly regular services throughout the first weeks of the outbreak. “The last two weeks were a little bit of a challenge due to some of our employees coming down with positive results,” said General Manager Eli Maravilla. “We ran our fast-food department on a short shift due to health cardholders being sick.”

After two weeks, things have calmed from an employee perspective. “This week everyone has returned, and we are again more or less up to speed,” he said.

“We had some issues with customers waiting, standing in long lines. We just want to make sure everyone is safe, so we maintain our protocol (for social distancing).” **mbj**



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# Back to the future — MVA and GVB head out to promote their islands

BY JULIAN RYALL  
Japan Correspondent

TOKYO, Japan — The largest exhibition venue in Japan is gearing up for what has traditionally been the biggest and most comprehensive travel expo in Asia, although it may take some time for the annual Tourism Expo Japan to build itself back to the scale and success it enjoyed in the years immediately before the global health pandemic.



lakopo

Undeterred, representatives of the Marianas Islands tourism industries are headed for the Tokyo Big Sight convention center for the four-day expo, which opens on Sept. 22, determined to reach out to existing partners and develop new contacts in the sector.

Organized by the three largest domestic organizations — the Japan Travel and Tourism Association, the Japan Association of Travel Agents and the Japan National Tourism Organization — the 2018 expo attracted well over 207,000 visitors and the 2019 version saw more than 151,000 visitors, despite being moved to a smaller venue in Osaka as Tokyo prepared to host the Olympic Games that summer.

The 2022 event is back at Tokyo Big Sight, which has more than 2.49 million square feet of event space spread across exhibition halls, conference rooms in the dedicated 58-meter-tall Conference Tower, a ballroom and outdoor exhibition spaces.

This year's theme is "Hello new journey."

To date, 400 companies or travel organizations have registered to exhibit, and the entire sector will be hoping the pent-up demand among frustrated travelers so many companies are reporting will drive up the number of visitors this year.

Priscilla M. Iakopo, managing director of the Marianas Visitors Authority, said MVA's return to the expo for the first time since 2019 will be a spectacular affair involving traditional dancers and cultural demonstrations, including banana-leaf painting. The final number of how many will be travelling to Japan has yet to be determined, but the agency will be well-represented, she said, and extremely busy during its stay.

"Our aim this year is to work hard to build awareness of the return of direct flights between Japan and Guam with United Airlines and

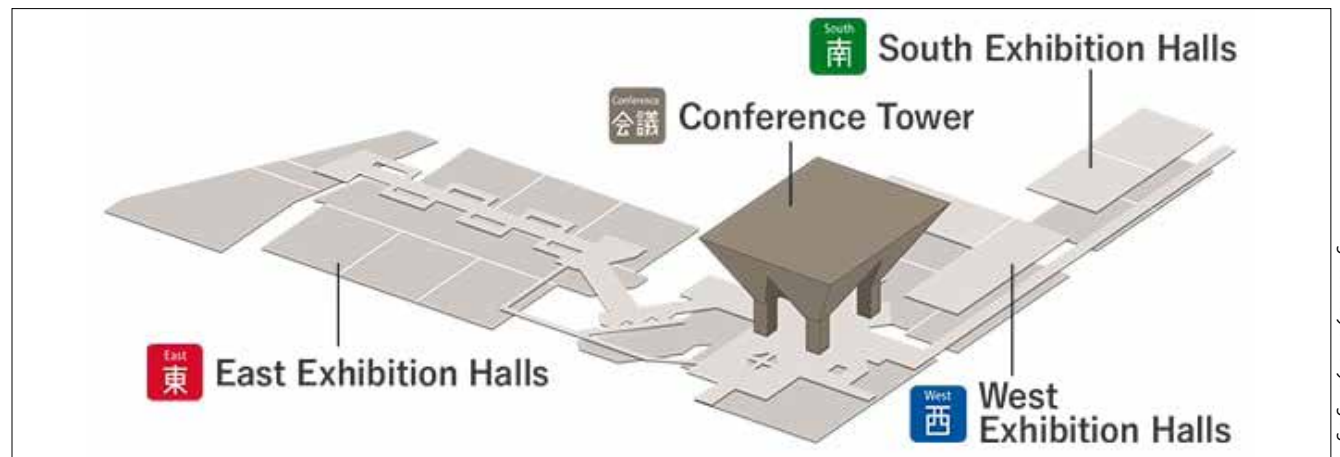


Image courtesy of Tokyo Big Sight

to promote our recently launched 'Marianacation' program," she said. "We are going to be doing a lot of promotion work and explaining the incentives that are available, such

as the free PCR tests that we are providing."

That offer remains, despite the Japanese government announcing it is dropping the requirement that

anyone seeking to enter Japan show proof of a negative PCR test within 72 hours of departure. The government

SEE **BACK** ON PAGE 18

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Photo by Justin Green

Sentry Hospitality Corp. hosted a dinner at the Capitol Kitchen's new location on Airport Road on July 30 to benefit the University of Guam Endowment Foundation. At the event were (from left) Thomas W. Krise, president of the University of Guam, Patricia Krise, wife of Thomas; Antoinette "Toni" Sanford, president, and David Sanford, vice president, and husband of Antoinette, both with the Sanford Technology Group.



Photo by Justin Green

Guam Animals in Need presented certificates of appreciation to Taiwan's National Chung-Hsing University and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Guam at the GAIN property in Yigo on Aug.3. TECO and the university brought 10 volunteer veterinarians to Guam for the The Taiwan Volunteer Vet Spay and Neuter Program. (From left) Dr. Pinchen Liu of the Department of Medicine at the university and Vincent Lu, deputy director from TECO.



Photo by Justin Green

Jack in the Box opened Aug. 4 in Tamuning. Staff at the restaurant include (from left) Joanne David, team leader; Mark Sigua, team leader; Julie Ann "Jules" Coronel, restaurant manager, and Camille Biala, team leader.

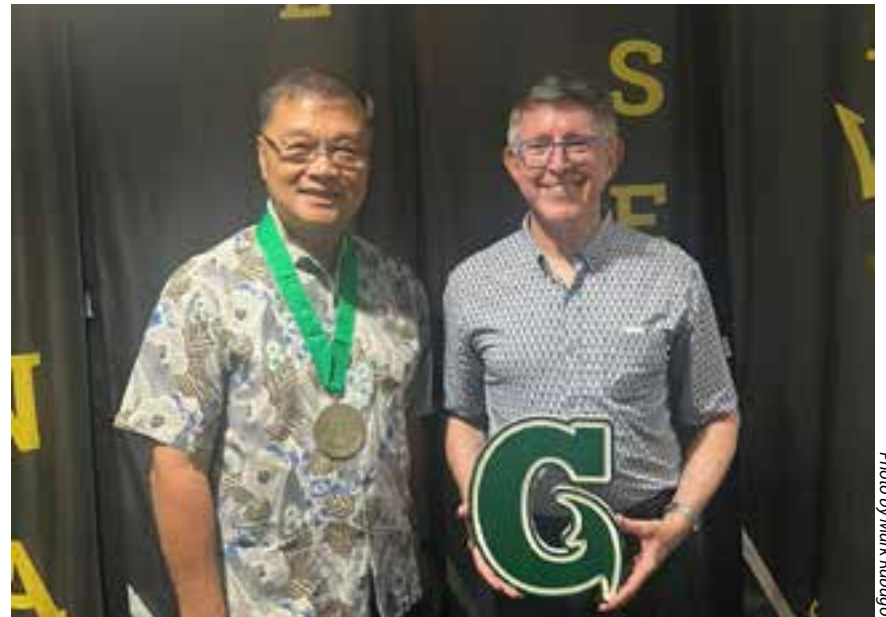


Photo by Mark Rabago

University of Guam President Thomas W. Krise presented Jerry Tan, CEO of Tan Holdings; with the first President's Medal during the UOG Athletic Scholarship Signing and Alumni Luncheon on Aug. 5 at the Hyatt Regency Saipan.



Photo by Justin Green

Shamrocks Pub & Eatery in the Park Arcade in Tumon held its reopening event Aug. 5. At Shamrocks were (from left) Jason Padua, general manager; Lee Heather, president of Shamrock Inc.; Richard Hawes, vice president of Shamrock Inc.; Shalyn Allen, secretary, all three from Shamrock Inc.; and Komisi Siolo, general manager.



Photo by Justin Green

At the Pink Ball Gala on Aug. 6 at the Dusit Thani Guam Resort were (from left) Nona Perez, program screening manager at Guam Cancer Care; Annette Garces, general manager, Philippine Medical and Dental referral Services LLC; Trixie Naholowaa-Torres, Guam Visitors Bureau, administrative assistant; Leah Beth Naholowaa, director, Starbase Guam, and mother of Trixie; Dr. Mariana L. Cook-Huynh, Marianas Physicians Group; Charlie Hermosa, general manager, APL; Chalorna Lauron, marketing and communications manager, Guam Regional Medical City; and Dominique R. Felix, associate broker-in-charge, realtor and property manager, Century 21 Realty Management Co. Beneficiaries of the event are Guam Cancer Care, Harvest House, Starbase Guam, and Women in Aviation International's Guam Chapter.



## Make-A-Wish Guam and CNMI held its Black Tie and Tennies Gala on Aug. 13 at the Hyatt Regency Guam.

Photos by Justin Green



(From left) Fidel Palacios, human resources assistant; Jimmy Bravo, general manager, Yigo restaurant, Ashley Ayuyu, human resources director; all with McDonald's Restaurants in Guam; Marcia E. Ayuyu owner/operator for McDonald's of Guam and Saipan; Socorro Yandoc; Divina Evaristo, marketing manager for McDonald's of Guam and Saipan; Vilmore Santiago, general manager, Harmon restaurant, and Albert Terbio, general manager, Hagåtña restaurant, both with McDonald's in Guam.



(From left) Jay Santos, general manager, Triple J Five Star Wholesale Foods Saipan; Isa B. Baza, attorney with Blair Sterling Johnson & Martinez PC; Christopher L.C. Duenas, chief financial officer with Triple J Enterprises Inc.; and Katrina A. Untalan, general manager, Compadres Mall Guam.



Photo by Maureen N. Maratiza

Attending the 7th Annual Assembly of Planners Symposium on Aug. 17 at the Dusit Thani Guam Resort were (from left) Matthew C. Santos, deputy director, and Lola E. Leon Guerrero, director, both with the Guam Bureau of Statistics and Plans; and Anita B. Enriquez, senior vice president and provost at the University of Guam.



Photo courtesy of Atkins Kroll Inc.

Jose "Jon" Sevilla, sales consultant for Atkins Kroll Toyota unveiled the 2022 Toyota Tundra i-FORCE MAX, Toyota's first hybrid pickup truck on Aug. 18.



Photo by Justin Green

The inaugural flight of Marianas Southern Airways arrived at the A.B. Won Pat International Airport, Guam on Aug. 19. At the ribbon cutting were (from left) Milton Morinaga, adviser to P.H.R. Ken Micronesia Inc. and chairman of the Guam Visitors Bureau; William Giles, vice president for the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam, Marianas Southern, Ian Vanderbeek, vice president for corporate services, both from Marianas Southern; Gov. Ralph DLG. Torres; Gov. Lourdes A. Leon Guerrero; Donald I. Weakley, secretary and director of the board of the airport, John "JQ" M. Quinata, executive manager of the airport; R. Keith Sisson, chief of staff, Southern Airways Express; Malia Louis, Big Island stations manager of Mokulele Airlines, a Southern Airways company; and Timothy Sprowls, pilot.



# Diverse offerings show business investment in the islands

BY OYAOL NGIRAIREKL  
and MAUREEN N. MARATITA  
Journal Staff

AIRAI, Palau and TAMUNING, Guam — The long-awaited opening of the Surangel Supercenter in Airai is scheduled to take place Sept. 5.

Surangel and Sons Co. invited the people of Palau to the celebration “and to experience the ‘Customer is King!’ services firsthand.” The event included a giveaway of a Toyota Vanguard and more than \$75,000 in prizes and promotions, according to a release.

The Supercenter, which has a total of 122,000 square feet, has three elevators and two escalators. The escalators are a first for Palau. It also has 350 parking spaces.

Among the businesses in the Supercenter is a Toyota dealership. The complex also houses Surangel’s Grocery, which will also have a bakery and deli; Mason’s Hardware Do It Center; and Chatime Bubble Tea Shop, according to the press release. It will soon include a food court, an office for Surangel Construction Co. as well as a drive-thru lumberyard. It will also include Surangel’s Wholesale, Surangel’s Department Store, Yrang’s Home Furnishings, Ksau’s Imaging Zone, the RAW Surf & Dive Shop; Surangel’s Worldwide Travel Corp. and Hot Wheels Palau.

“Our success over the past 42



Photo by Oyaol Ngirairekl

**The Surangel Supercenter will open Sept. 5 in Airai, with more than 120,000 square feet of retail space and 350 parking spaces.**

years has been because of you and this new location will further expand our services to you, our loyal customers. We hope this new location with expanded services will provide you with a more enjoyable shopping experience,” Surangel Whipps Sr. said in the release.

Whipps founded Surangel and Sons Co. in Palau in 1980. It started as a community store in his home in Ngerbeched, Koror. The company is now one of the largest providers of goods and services in Palau with more than 600 employees working in retail, wholesale, travel and construction. The company regularly sponsors sports and neighborhood events, as well as giving donations to local schools and churches.

Whipps is the father of President Surangel S. Whipps Jr. and Sen. Mason Whipps.



Rendering courtesy of the RIHGA Royal Laguna Guam Resort

**The as-yet unnamed new pool bar at the RIHGA Royal will extend out to take advantage of the location and the viewfeet of retail space and 350 parking spaces.**


Meanwhile, the RIHGA Royal Laguna Guam Resort’s investment in its Tamuning property continues.

By the end of the year the hotel should finish expansion of a new pool bar, part of which will extend out over the property, making the most of the location and view. Noboyuki “Kevin” Tsurui, general


manager of the RIHGA, said, “It hasn’t been named yet.” The bar is “inspired by bars in Indonesia,” he said.

The hotel is known for its King’s Bread milk bread, but Tsurui said the hotel will expand with a retail bak-

SEE DIVERSE ON PAGE 27



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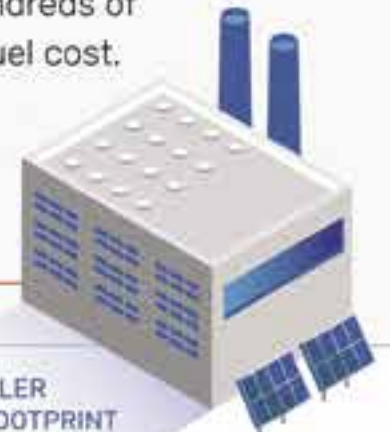
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The Ukudu power plant and new reserve unit are integral parts of GPA's program to add more renewables to achieve 50% renewables by 2035 and 100% renewables by 2045.



Scan to learn more about  
**GPA's Journey to  
100% Renewable Energy**





**BACK**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

will also raise the maximum number of daily arrivals from 20,000 to 50,000.

The decision to relax some of the most stringent entry rules worldwide is partly designed to encourage more visitors and boost both national and regional economies, but is also due to other countries phasing out PCR testing capabilities as they transition to a "living with coronavirus" post-pandemic situation.

It has been difficult and expensive for people to travel to Japan, including nationals returning from a holiday overseas. Travel associations and Keidanren, the Japan Business Federation, have for at least six months been calling for regulations to be eased, pointing out that prolonging the regulations would hurt the economy and nation's reputation as an open and welcoming destination.

Iakopo welcomed the Japanese government's decision, but emphasized that the offer of free PCR tests remains "because we still want our visitors to feel safe."

Other offers from MVA designed to appeal to Japanese travelers are free golf, scuba diving and sky diving opportunities, she told the Journal.

The expo will be a chance to demonstrate just how committed

MVA is to the Japanese market, which has proved to be a strong and important partner for many years, she said.

In addition to business-to-business discussions, the MVA contingent will hold talks with officials of United Airlines, which launched a direct flight from Tokyo to Saipan on Sept. 1, with Gov. Ralph DLG. Torres scheduled to take part in the ceremony for the inaugural flight.

MVA officials will also explore the possibility of increased flights on the route and will reach out to other airlines, including low-cost carriers, to investigate the introduction of flights.

The Guam Visitors Bureau also has high hopes for what will be the most significant travel expo in Japan for at least three years, said Nadine Leon Guerrero, director of GBV global marketing.

"At its peak, Guam welcomed over 1 million Japanese visitors to the island annually," she said. "Fast forward to today — the Japan market has had a slow crawl to recover from the impact of COVID-19.

"The Guam Visitors Bureau has been working diligently to en-



Leon Guerrero

courage travel to the island and maintain some presence as Japan slowly eases back with its travel restrictions," she said. "Through GVB's 'GoGo! Guam' campaign, Guam has worked with groups of social media influencers and the Japanese travel trade to encourage and support demand from the Japan market."

The agency recently hosted its first trade familiarization tour from Japan since 2019, bringing in about 50 travel agents, media, and other travel trade partners to support the GVB's market recovery efforts and to experience the best of Guam's current product offerings.

GVB has also been working with the Department of Public Health and local partners to extend its free coronavirus testing program for travelers.

"In the short term, we are excited by the recent news that Japan will no longer require negative COVID-19 tests for incoming vaccinated passengers," Leon Guerrero said. "We hope Japan will continue to ease back its travel restrictions as that will encourage more travel not only to Guam but to Japan as well.



Mesa

"Guam has been doing good with keeping its COVID-19 numbers down, so we feel both Guam and Japan are ready for changes in relaxed travel restrictions," she said. "GVB hopes the country lifts its visa requirements so it will be easier to conduct business travel."

In the longer term, she added, Guam is looking forward "to a full recovery of the Japan market and more affordable flights between Guam and Japan.

"With our histories and cultures intertwined, it is with great hope and effort we work toward the full realization of a thriving and healthy relationship with the Japanese people for many more decades to come."

GVB solidified funding for its delegation to the expo in mid-August and reached out to members to participate on Aug. 25, on a first come, first served basis. GVB had not shared details of any plans outside of the expo as the Journal went to press.

Monte D.M. Mesa will be among the Guam delegation in Tokyo again this year. The general manager of Guam Premium Outlets and Tumon Sands Plaza malls has been a fixture at the event between 2000 and 2019.

"The Tokyo Expo has always been important to connect with the new leaders of the Japanese tour agents,

SEE BACK ON PAGE 25



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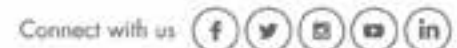


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# United optimistic, but in wait and see mode on more flights to Saipan

BY JULIAN RYALL  
Japan Correspondent

TOKYO, Japan — On the Aug. 31 eve of the departure of the new United Airlines service between Japan and Saipan on Sept. 1, Gov. Ralph DLG. Torres told attendees at a reception at the ANA InterContinental Hotel in Tokyo that the resumption of regular flights on the route will “revitalize” the island’s tourism sector.

Taking the stage at the event — attended by more than 100 representatives of Japanese travel organizations, the media, the Marianas Visitors Authority and their partner companies, Torres emphasized the long-standing links between Japan and Saipan and looked to the future.

“Our relationship with United Airlines reaffirms this strong relationship as we look into the future and the revitalization of the CNMI market,” he said. “With the Marianas Visitors Authority and United Airlines establishing this route between Narita International Airport and Saipan, we can once again work on bringing Japanese visitors back to the Marianas,” he added.

“And we cannot wait to share the

beauty of our islands once again,” the governor said.

Steve Knode, deputy senior commercial officer at the U.S. embassy in Tokyo, congratulated all the stakeholders on the launch of regular, non-stop services between Tokyo and Saipan, describing the development as “exciting.”

He also welcomed the Japanese government’s recent decision to drop the requirement that anyone entering Japan report a negative PCR test no less than 72 hours before departure.

“We are very hopeful that the easing of restrictions will spur travel — and what better place is there to travel than Saipan, for friends and family?” Knode said.

Toru Takahashi, managing director for Japan and Micronesia sales for United Airlines, told the Journal he is confident that anyone travelling to Saipan will enjoy all the opportunities to relax that the island offers — from world-class diving to golf, dining out and simply relaxing — but sounded a note of caution on expanding the service from three days a week at present.

“Our first mission is to be successful with three flights a week,” he said.



Photo by Julian Ryall

(From left) Toru Takahashi, managing director for Japan and Micronesia sales for United Airlines, Gov. Ralph DLG. Torres and Steve Knode, deputy senior commercial officer at the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo attended the launch party in Tokyo for the inaugural United flight to Saipan.

“Then we need to see how the market is developing. At the moment, it is too early to make a decision on more flights, but we can say that once we do have success then we can think about more flights.”

Torres was accompanied on his mission to Tokyo by David DLG. Atalig, secretary of finance for the Northern Mariana Islands, Rep. Roy C. Ada and members of the Marianas Visitors Authority, including Ellsbeth Viola Alepuyo, chairwoman of the MVA board, and Priscilla M. Iakopo, managing director of MVA.

The first tourists on the flight are accompanied by Japanese travel agents and journalists. The NMI VIPs were scheduled to travel to Narita airport on the afternoon of Sept. 1 for a ribbon cutting ceremony for the inaugural flight.

The flight — UA825 — was due to take off at 9.25 p.m. local time on Sept. 1 and land in Saipan at 2 a.m. on Sept. 2, where its about 75 passengers will be met by local dignitaries and a ceremony to mark the arrival of the opening of the route. An event is scheduled the evening of Sept. 2 at the Hyatt Regency Saipan. **mbj**



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**CDC**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

lessen, the facts say, even with the complicated logistical issues and limited resources that we have in the Marshall Islands, and even though we have a very immuno-compromised population, we have had one of the best responses to this pandemic the world has seen.”

Speaking on Aug. 25, he said, “Our goal from the beginning has been resolute — let the science catch up to the virus, and now we are seeing the result of over two years of diligent

prevention and preparation.”

The widespread use of PaxLovid has been seen by many as a magic bullet, reducing severe symptoms for many residents who tested positive.

Niedenthal said the Marshall Islands is one of the only countries “in the world to have been able to offer people of all ages vaccines before we had community spread of the virus.” He said, “Our current fatality rate of 0.1% of COVID-19 cases ranks as among the best in the world, with only Palau having a similar fatality rate for this virus.” **mbj**

**BACK**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

travel media networks and airline companies to support overseas travel to Guam,” he said. “In addition, it has been needed to promote Guam to Japanese overseas travelers who have not yet had the opportunity to visit Guam.”

But this year is arguably more important than ever before, he said.

“We need to have the Japanese market put Guam to the front of their minds for short, overseas trips after the lock-down of the last 28 months,” he said.

The message to the Japanese

travel industry will be, “Come with your family and safely experience the nice blue skies, the clean air, swimming in the tropical aqua-blue waters and the white sand beaches of Guam,” Mesa said.

And he is hopeful that the worst of the crisis is now behind the travel industry.

“I am more optimistic than others that our Japanese travelers will return to Guam sooner than later, with some projecting full recovery by 2024,” he said. “And I hope that the removal of more Japanese travel restrictions will assist in opening up overseas travel for the Japanese market to Guam and the Marianas.” **mbj**



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**LOCAL**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

could soon find some options at Sun Energy Motors.

“We’re basically starting with street motorcycles, but we may be opening up in the future to offering smaller off-road (electric motorcycles),” Ulloa said.

The company is looking to expand to Saipan, but details are not solidified yet.

When Sun Energy first opened doors in Guam last year, the company introduced the Evoke Urban Classic. It’s a mid-size motorcycle built for most riders, comparable to a 400 CC to 600 CC gasoline-operated motorcycle.

It’s a good-size street bike, according to Ulloa.

“Most Harleys are cruiser type motorcycles. And those are built a lot where you can sit and lean back like you’re cruising. Then you also

have your racers — these go super-fast, and you see those on the racetrack. You see people leaning over the gas tank, into the handlebars. (The Evoke motorcycle) is something in the middle ... here you’re more vertical on the bike and the build provides more rideability on commutes,” he said.

The motorcycle can also go from 0 to 60 mph in 5 or 6 seconds, but it’s engineered for new riders “so you’re not going to pop-a-wheelie” by accident, he said. There’s “no shifting, no clutch, no gears,” which makes for the smooth and easy ride, Ulloa said. He added that because it’s an electric motorcycle — which means it doesn’t have a fuel-powered engine — there’s no heat, no emission, and it’s quiet. **mbj**



Photo by Oyoai Ngrariki

Sun Energy Motors is a Guam-based electric motorcycle company located on Marine Corps Drive in Tamuning.

**DIVERSE**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

ery on the property – the Panaderia. He said the Club Lounge will also be renovated by the end of the year.

The hotel is also introducing the Chef’s Table with Chef Yuzuru Okamoto (See “The Dish” on Page 29 “I’d like [the RIHGA] to be known as a foodie’s hotel,” Tsurui said, describing the plans as a “first step.”

Room renovations will happen next year, as part of what Tsurui previously told the Journal is a “seven figures-plus” refurbishment of the property. The hotel has re-carpeted the ballroom and painted the exterior of the property earlier. (See “In with the new,” in the April 4 issue of the Journal.)

Also, the Guam Brewery’s Taphouse re-opened Aug. 4, though in a 16,000 square foot smaller property in the Blue Lagoon Plaza. Andrew Brunson, head brewer; said, “I opened up with just beer, because it meant I could open up sooner.” The Taphouse has 12 taps and a variety of seltzers. New products are regularly introduced. “I’m going to brew soon a Japanese lager,” Brunson said.

As to food, Brunson said, “I’m working on a kitchen. We’re going to do five things and we’re going to do them well.”

Guam Brewery beverages are sold at Pay-Less supermarkets, restaurants and convenience stores on-island and sell well, Brunson said. “It’s larger volume, but much smaller margins.” The Taphouse retails t-shirts and hats, which are also popular.

Opening hours are from Tuesday to Thursday, from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m., Friday from 4 p.m. to midnight, Saturday from 3 p.m. to midnight and Sunday from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. **mbj**

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# NMI business groups focus on future opportunities and challenges



Photo by Mark Rabago

Attending the August business summit at the Saipan World Resort were (From left) Joe E. Ayuyu Jr., vice president of McDonald's of Guam and Saipan; Michael S. Sablan, vice president of Triple J Enterprises Inc.; Kina B. Peter, corporate controller for Triple J Saipan; Matthew Deleon Guerrero, regional director for ARI Ltd.; and Joe C. Guerrero, co-owner of Naked Fish Bar & Grill.

BY MARK RABAGO  
Saipan Correspondent

The Northern Mariana Islands now has three chambers of commerce that aim to help local companies navigate the challenging world of private enterprise.

## Saipan Chamber of Commerce

SUSUPE, Saipan — The Saipan Chamber of Commerce was formed in 1959, decades before the NMI came into existence.

From a high of around 160 members in 2017, its membership has dropped to 136.

"Unfortunately, membership has decreased in the last couple of years.

SCC believes the main driver for the decrease in membership is due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the financial challenges of maintaining a business," said Kimberly Camacho, incoming executive director.

However, Sablan said SCC hopes that participants who attended the Aug. 10 Friends of Business Summit will take advantage of its Start-Up membership — free for the first year of doing business.

"SCC has a good mix of small, medium, and large businesses within our membership. We look to attract startups, new businesses, and those from within the Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino communities," she said, recognizing that the pandemic was a struggle for almost all businesses.

"The SCC continued to ask the CNMI government to help businesses in need of support. The SCC leadership was fortunate to collaborate on the BOOST Program and provided input into its development," she said.

BOOST stands for Building Optimism, Opportunities and Stability Together, and is a project of the Office of the Governor and the Department of Commerce that aims to provide financial assistance to businesses and non-profit organizations. In the past year, the chamber also worked to keep members informed about workforce training/subsidy opportunities with the Department of Labor, Public School System, and the Northern Marianas Technical Institute, as well as IT infrastructure developments at the Department of Finance, she said.

The shortage of Commonwealth Only Transitional Workers is also a major concern for the group.

"The biggest issue that businesses face, directly or indirectly, is the availability of CW workers and foreign workers in general, especially as the CNMI economy reopens to tourism," Sablan said.

"The government and the private sector need to continue to voice the need for a CW program that works for our situation. There are proposals currently being considered by CNMI Delegate Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan to address many of the issues related to the current CW program. We understand that the proposals may be included in one or more bills that may be considered by the U.S. Congress in the coming months," she said.

SCC's leadership team also includes Joe C. Guerrero, co-owner of the Naked Fish Bar & Grill, Shayne Villanueva, operations manager for AB Risk Solutions, vice president; Marcia Calvo, account executive with Calvo's Insurance Underwriters, sec-

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SEE NMI ON PAGE 30





The RIHGA Royal Laguna Guam Resort launched Sept. 1 the **President (Nippon) restaurant's Chef's Table with Chef Yuzuru Okamoto**, offering each evening from Monday to Saturday a group of up to five people the chance to be served one of three multi-course menus at a private Teppan dinner. Now in Guam, Okamoto has lived in Europe, the U.S. mainland and spent more than 12 years at Roppongi Ukai-tei in Tokyo, also as head chef.

The menus are the Botan, a seven-course menu; the Kikyo, a six-course menu; and the Sakura, also a six-course menu. All menus come with 100 grams or 3.5 oz of Kyushu Wagyu Steak. Menus will vary and include seasonal ingredients and seafood, and the famous Wagyu beef.

The Journal was served the Sakura menu, which the night of our visit, featured the following dishes:



*The Salmon & Hamachi (amberjack) Mariné was served with apple, crisp jicama and sesame dressing.*



*Wagyu Steak – the star of the menu – was cooked for us with seasonal vegetables – local okra and Korean Eryngii mushrooms in a ponzu dressing, and side sauces of sesame, radish and finadene.*



*Dessert was a light confection of orange cake, vanilla ice cream, and a layered surprise that included custard, mochi and sweet black beans.*

Reservations are required, to Steve Balakrishna, director of food and beverage at (671) 688-8123. The Botan menu is \$190 per person, the Kikyo menu is \$160, and the Sakura menu \$130. Extra beef is to order at \$30 for 50 grams.

Menus are subject to a 10% service charge; PHR Club discounts of 20% are applicable.

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CONSTRUCTION



**NMI**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

retary; Janice Tenorio, manager for customer service, IT&E CNMI, treasurer; and Alexander A. Sablan, vice president at Tan Holdings, Velma A. Palacios, director of Network Operations and Engineering, IT&E CNMI; Nicole Babauta, consumer sales manager for Docomo Pacific, and Joshua Wise, general manager and pharmacist, Pacific Health Inc., all directors.

**Rota Chamber of Commerce**

SONG SONG, Rota — The Rota Chamber of Commerce was established on April 13, and has 17 members that range from small to medium businesses.

Although attempts were made in the past, this time the group was

able to gather, adopt, and submit all required documents to form as a non-profit organization in CNMI in April.

The RCC asked that its comments be attributed to its officers as a group.

The chamber is hoping to recruit more members to ensure all industries are included to best represent the needs of the local business community.

The biggest issue facing Rota businesses and the island's people continues to be its isolation. The chamber said Rota is the most isolated island in the NMI and therefore the cost to import goods is higher.

"The business community feels that many laws should be amended to best balance the need to import as well as streamline all the establishment and enforcement requirements. The collaborative partnership between the

private sector and the Department of Labor and Department of Commerce are crucial to help identify outdated laws that should be amended to accommodate the business owners in finding more alternative ways to help businesses cut costs to help reduce the prices of commodities and services on our island.

"We believe that a strong partnership with open-minded views will help RCC's vision to create an island where businesses, family and community succeed as one," officials said.

The chamber also opposes House Bill 22-98, as it will only further increase the cost of living for consumers on Rota. Rep. Christina E. Sablan introduced the bill to gradually increase the NMI minimum wage to \$10 an hour from \$7.25.

Chamber president Steven McCoy and a few other members attended

the House of Representatives public hearing in Rota, to share their opposition to the bill.

The group said it intends to vocalize the needs and concerns of the business community that will negatively affect not only local businesses, but the wider Rota community also.

The chamber plans to apply for some funding through the NMI government's BOOST Program to help start the organization.

"RCC is willing and ready to push forward with the mission to empower local enterprises as a resource, advocate, and connector for Rota's private sectors," officials said.

Besides McCoy, chamber officers are Aubry M. Hocog, special assistant at the Office of the Mayor of Rota, vice president; Dana Calvo, Rota contact for the NMI Office of Grants Management & State Clearinghouse, secretary; Jacqueline A. Manglona, operations manager of Kin & Rit Enterprises and Kin & Rit Inc., treasurer. Other members of the board of directors are Juan "Juanpan" T. Guerrero, president/general manager, Insurance & Business Management Corp.; Pedro Dela Cruz, owner, Rota Merchandizing and DK Brothers, Vincent Calvo, Justin S. Manglona, and Kaye Christian.

**Tinian Chamber of Commerce**

SAN JOSE, Tinian — The Tinian Chamber of Commerce had about 130 members in 2014. Most were minority-owned small businesses, women-owned businesses or HUBZone certified businesses, according to Journal files.

The closure of the Tinian Dynasty Hotel & Casino, Rota's biggest employer, forced many businesses to shutter. The COVID-19 pandemic and Super typhoons Soudelor and Yutu and COVID-19 also burdened businesses that were left.

The Tinian Chamber is about to restart its membership drive, according to Neal Eisgrou, secretary. "We haven't gotten many of our original businesses to join," he said.

Initially, the TCC wanted the rescinding of the Consolidated Natural Resources Act of 2008, which extended most provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act and other U.S. immigration laws to the NMI. The CNRA in turn gave birth to the Commonwealth Only Transitional Workers program.

USCIS reduced the CW-1 quota to 9,998 for fiscal 2018. "They fired nurses and other critical workers. They fired all my cooks. The U.S. congress had to intervene and increase the quota to 13,000 for FY 2019. The United States Government Accountability Office said removing all CW-1 workers by 2019 could reduce the CNMI's GDP by up to 62%. The studies show we need them," Eisgrou said.

SEE NMI ON PAGE 31



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**NMI**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30

The CNRA has become one of the biggest stumbling blocks in the continued development of local enterprise on Tinian, he said. The coming exit requirement for CW workers is an added burden, he said. "This year it takes seven months for companies to get approval for their CW workers. By the time they get here it is time to leave or renew. If it takes seven more months to renew and they cannot work during that time, how do we run our businesses?"

If he had his way, Eisgrou said Tinian and Rota would be better off controlling its own immigration and in essence taking over the CW program. A recent Tinian chamber

survey showed 81% of those surveyed (17 of 21) wanted it rescinded and return the running of the foreign worker program to the CNMI. Survey results also showed that an overwhelming number also want long-term CWs to be granted unconditional permanent CW status.

"In order for the people of the CNMI to increase their prosperity, businesses must be allowed to flourish and not have their efficiency reduced by the USCIS," Eisgrou said in his letter with the survey results to Gregorio "Kilili" C. Sablan, the NMI's delegate to Congress.

Eisgrou said the chamber now wants a pilot program where Tinian and Rota take over the CW program. "It makes sense, since we need it the most and we know our business well

and can keep track of them better than the U.S. mainland."

He is also proposing that the NMI government give Tinian businesses \$1,000 for each U.S. citizen or resident they hire, to be paid back after the employee serves a full year.

Eisgrou, who owns JC Cafe, said this would make up for the losses incurred by employees working for short amounts of time and then quitting.

Other members of the chamber leadership are Phillip T. Mendiola-Long, president of Fiduciary Resources LLC, president; Marilyn "Jackie" Mendiola, branch manager, Bank of Guam, treasurer; and Allen Perez, Joey "J.P." San Nicholas, and Jack Manglona, owner of Tinian Shipping Services LLC; all directors. **mbj**

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