

Phuket Gazette

April 16 - 22, 2016

Now inside **THE NATION** every Saturday

56 Pages / 20 Baht

‘MY FAMILY DISOWNED ME AND KICKED ME OUT’

Struggling *With* stigma

AIDS cases in Phuket are the highest in Thailand

By Chutharat Plerin

EIGHTEEN year old ‘Nok’ is a normal, healthy-looking school girl struggling to cope with a dark past brought about by the shame and stigma of being diagnosed HIV positive.

She found out she had contracted the disease when she became pregnant at 15 years old.

“I was scared and confused. I asked my parents for help and they made me abort the baby,” she recalled.

“I live and study in Phuket because it’s hard to be around the people I know back home in Bangkok. My parents check on me regularly and I go to school like other girls. However, not all my friends know I have HIV.

“I am trying to live my life as normally as I can, but I don’t want to get romantically involved with anyone as it will be awkward when they find out about my condition. I feel that people treat me differently when they find out the truth,” said Nok.

Patong bar worker ‘Ae’ is another woman struggling to cope with the disease. At 32 years old, Ae already looks worn down from a lifetime of struggling to support herself



Over the last 27 years, the PPHO has recorded 8,324 cases of HIV. Photo: Isaac Stone Simonelli.

through drug addiction as well as dealing with having AIDS. From an early age she worked in Pattaya before moving to Phuket.

“I had a very careless attitude about my health – I drank, shared needles while doing drugs and had unprotected sex”.

Ms Ae admitted that despite asking her customers to use condoms, not all of them

agreed to do so. “I did not resist much because I did not want to lose clients. I did not make wearing condoms a strict rule for my customers because I wasn’t really aware of the dangers of HIV then,” she said.

One of the worst things AIDS sufferers have to deal with is rejection by society.

“People’s attitudes towards me changed when they found out I was HIV positive; not so

much my friends and coworkers – they didn’t treat me any differently – but my family disowned me and kicked me out of the house, despite the fact that I had helped to build it,” said Ms Ae.

“I had to return home when I got very ill about four years ago, but my stepmother said she couldn’t...”

Continued on Page 4-5

Thai star hit with criminal defamation

THE alleged owner of 24 rai of land on Naka Noi Island has filed a criminal defamation lawsuit against a famous Thai actor involved in the land dispute on the small island off Phuket’s east coast.

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BUSINESS



Phuket’s anchovy industry is more than just small fry for local fishermen

PROPERTY



Amy Koh explains why ‘Millennials’ are the new tourism target market.

LIFE & STYLE



This Sceptered Isle: Touts, speedboats, sun-loungers and jet-skis



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LOCAL NEWS

Briefly

Return of the pink jellyfish

BLOOMS of 'pink jellyfish' spotted off the coast of Krabi have prompted officials to issue a warning to tourists not to swim in some areas of Phi Phi National Park.

"We don't know exactly what species of jellyfish within the Pelagiidae family they are," said Charatsee Aungtonya, a marine expert from the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR). "However, based on the photographs, especially with regards to their tentacles, it is best to avoid them."

Nopparat Thara - Mu Ko Phi Phi National Park Chief Chaiya Chaikham issued the jellyfish warning.

"We spotted the blooms off Koh Mai Pai [Bamboo Island]. It's very normal for the time of year. They should be gone within a week," he said.

Mr Chaiya was also unable to specifically identify the jellyfish beyond the local name for them, which translates as 'red jellyfish'.

"As far as I know, they are venomous, but their stings are not lethal," he said.

"If you are stung by these jellyfish, pouring vinegar on the wound can help relieve the pain. However, some people may have allergic reactions to the stings, so we have medical teams on standby."

- Kritsada Mueanhawong

Propeller kills fisherman taking a leak

A MYANMAR fisherman urinating off the back of a boat was killed after falling into the water and getting caught in the propeller on April 9.

Three-eyed kids art causes controversy



Paintings of three-eyed children by Thai graffiti artist Patcharapol Tangruen (Alex Face) that recently appeared on the walls of the Baba Museum on Phang Nga Road in Phuket Town have stirred up controversy among members of the Phuket Old Town Committee, who are concerned that the paintings do not reflect traditional culture. Phuket City Municipality defended the artwork, saying that the paintings depicted children playing hide-and-seek. For the full story visit PhuketGazette.net Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong.

The 30-year-old fisherman, named by police only as Mr Nai, reportedly fell off the edge of fishing boat *Eakmombkolchai* 111 into the spinning blades below.

"Nitikorn Sangklapo, 43, the captain of the boat, reported that the incident occurred at about 9:45pm. We responded immediately and dispatched emergency medical personnel to the scene, not far from Koh Dok Mai," said Phuket Marine Police Chief Panya Chaichana. "However, Mr Nai suffered fatal wounds to his torso and thighs. He was pronounced dead at the scene."

- Chutharat Plerin

Bridge opened after 20 years

TRANSPORT Minister Arkhom Termpittayapaisith chaired the grand opening of the much-anticipated Klong

Koh Pee Flyover on April 6.

The roadway, officially named Thep Srisin Bridge, connects Sakdidet Road Soi 7 directly to Saphan Hin.

"The bridge will improve traffic flow. Additionally, it is a beautiful structure that is a boon to Phuket tourism," Minister Arkhom said.

The bridge was originally slated to be finished in September last year, which has led to months of daily 200,000-baht fines.

Work began on the project almost 20 years ago, but was held up after the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment ruled that the final stretch could not be built through mangroves in the area, which drains an area of low-lying land, much of it the legacy of sediments deposited there during decades of tin mining.

Then, in 2012, the project was pushed forward by the Cabinet under the Yingluck Administration.

The approval follows a series of special legal amendments, enacted specifically for Phuket and the Klong Koh Pee project, during the administration of the Abhisit government. The amendments allow projects in mangrove preserves with 'exceptional public benefits to go forward, but only with Cabinet approval.

Ground was first broken for the flyover project in 2013.

- Chutharat Plerin

Sea gypsies fight back by filling in holes

POLICE and military officers rushed to Rawai to prevent a violent clash between private investors and local sea gypsies in a beach front property dispute on April 11.

"Men hired by Baron World Trade Co had gone to the site to work on developing the property, but locals were trying to stop them by filling up holes that were being dug," said Rawai Mayor Aroon Solos, who confirmed that no one was injured during the incident.

The dispute over the land arose when Baron World Trade Co attempted to develop a section of the 19 rai of beachfront land for which they hold Chanote titles. However, the pathway used by the sea gypsies to access a sacred site situated on the property runs directly through the area that the private investors are attempting to build on.

The sea gypsies are fighting a number of court cases for alleged encroachment in their attempt to establish their claim to plots that are owned by sev-

eral investors.

Leaders of the nomadic people turned down the provincial government's idea of purchasing the disputed land from the investors and putting it aside for the sea gypsies to use.

It is clear that the land was ours and that we have a rightful claim to it, so we do not agree with the province's proposal to buy the land, mentioned community leader Ngeem Damrongkaset.

- Chutharat Plerin

River of fruit juice flows on Kamala Hill

A SIX-WHEEL TRUCK laden with fruit flipped on Kamala Hill, spilling its load across the road on April 6.

The single-vehicle accident caused tailbacks for several hours while a clean-up team righted the truck and cleared the road of produce.

"A crane was brought in to pull the truck out of a ditch. The driver, Somparn Talunai, 42, escaped with minor injuries," said Lt Col Somneuk Dumkaew of the Kamala Police.

Mr Somparn was delivering fruit from Pathum Thani to customers in Patong.

"He lost control of the truck on a bend while going down the hill and collided with the roadside barrier," said Lt Col Somneuk.

Police impounded the truck and charged Mr Somparn with reckless driving and causing damage to property.

- Winai Sarot

Krabi locals pay respect to metal cow pat

LOCALS are paying their respects to a large chunk of metal that was found in a steaming pile of cow feces on April 7.

"I found it when I went to collect the cow poo for fertilizer," said 53-year-old Boonjan Duangjan. "I've raised about 15 cows in my palm plantation for more than 20 years, but have never seen something as strange as this."

The piece of metal, about the size of an egg and weighing about 100 grams, looks like a baby inside a mother's belly, said Ms Boonjan. "We believe that it is lucky, so we have put it on a shelf so we can pray and pay respect to it."

- Kritsada Mueanhawong

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Famous actor hit with computer crimes act in Phuket land case

By Kritsada Mueanhawong

THE alleged owner of 24 rai of land on Naka Noi Island on April 10 filed a criminal defamation lawsuit against a famous Thai actor involved in a land dispute about the property.

The owner of Six Mountains Co Ltd, Chanwit Kitlertsiriwattan, who bought the land in 2014, claims that allegations made by the actor could damage him and his company.

“The Facebook post about gunmen and a backhoe clearing the land can negatively impact our company, especially as neither of the claims is true,” Mr Chanwit said.

Puri Hiranprueck, whose family owns the vast majority of Naka Noi Island, brought the case to the Department of Special Investigations (DSI) about



The owner of Six Mountains Co Ltd filed a criminal defamation case against Thai actor Puri Hiranprueck. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong.

four years ago.

In 2014, *SorKor1* #70 was upgraded to a *NorSor3Kor* for a plot of land on Naka Noi, explained Lt Col Prawut Wongseenin, director of the DSI’s Bureau of Consumer Protection and Environmental Crime.

“During the upgrading, the size of the plot changed from about seven rai to about 17 rai,” Col Prawut said. “With the new size, the ocean now bordered the plot on two sides.”

The same day that the land document was upgraded, it was

sold to Six Mountains Co Ltd for more than 42 million baht.

As the DSI is investigating the case, Mr Puri alleged in a Facebook post that he had gone out to stop a group of men hired by the landowner from clearing the forest.

The allegations made in the post are part of the evidence that Mr Chanwit presented to officers at the Thalang Police Station.

Vice Governor Chokdee Amornwat checked the area last week and found no evidence to back Mr Puri’s claims. However, Mr Chanwit said that he would stop any development on the land until the documents’ validity was verified.

“There is no need for the DSI to ask military officers to step in and invoke Article 44. We are fine with waiting for the court’s verdict,” he said.

Immigration denies reports of terrorists



Commissioner Nathathorn. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

A recently leaked ‘intelligence report’ indicating that four terrorists from Uyghur in Central Asia had entered Phuket and Samui was knocked back when Immigration Commissioner Nathathorn Prou-soontorn told local media in Phuket that there were no records of the report’s alleged terrorist suspects entering Thailand.

“However, we will boost security at popular tourist destinations during the Songkran festival,” he said.

–Kritsada Mueanhawong

Traffic finally flows through much awaited Underpass

THE northbound lane of the long-awaited Samkong Underpass finally been opened for traffic yesterday, after being marred with a deluge of problems. Construction on the project is now expected to end by July 31.

“Drivers should be cau-

tious while driving through the construction area, as there is still heavy machinery on site,” he said. He suggested using an alternative route if possible.

Two weeks ago, Boon Tapanadul from the Bangkok Ombudsman’s Office, was told that the project, which is worth

more than 800 million baht, would be fully operational by May. However, the *Gazette* has learned that the project will not be finished until the end of July, making it more than a year behind schedule.

After three contractually acceptable push-backs of the

completion date, Wiwat Construction Co Ltd was allowed a December 21, 2015 completion date, before a daily fine of two million baht was to be charged. However a 30-day grace period was granted, further pushing the date to January 22.

– Chutharat Plerin



Samkong Underpass. Photo: Highways Department



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Surin Beach businesses beg Bangkok to stop demolition

ABOUT 20 evicted Surin beachfront shop owners appealed to the Justice Ministry in Bangkok on April 7 in hopes of stopping or delaying the demolition of their restaurants, shops and clubs.

Ma-ann Samran, president of the Cherng Talay Tambon Administration Organization (*OrBorTor*), told the *Gazette* on April 8 that he is aware of the complaint, but was not worried about it.

"We are only following orders from the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) to clear the beaches for the public. We have been working very hard on it. It took a lot of time to get to this stage," said Mr Ma-ann.

Last month, Phuket Vice Governor Chokdee Amornwat announced that the deadline for tearing down illegal buildings is April 20 for Surin Beach, and April 27 for Lay Pang and



Business owners are trying to delay a second round of destruction at Surin Beach. Photo: Gazette file

Layan beaches.

"We have already discussed the matter at length with the shop owners, but they don't want to follow the rules. We have gotten all the required approvals and the demolition date remains

unchanged," Mr Ma-ann said.

"I understand that they will do whatever they can to postpone or stop the demolition. However, we intend to stick to our plan, unless we are ordered to stop by the relevant authorities."

– *Chutharat Plerin*

Changing

Continued from Page 1

... stand living under the same roof with me and chased me out of the house. I had nowhere to go, so I moved here to Phuket."

"Society does not accept HIV patients. Unfortunately, I can neither change my fate, nor the way people treat me," said Ms Ae.

Nok and Ae are just two of the thousands of people in Phuket alone that are living with AIDS. The province has the highest incidence of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) in Thailand, the latest Phuket Provincial Health Office (PPHO) statistics reveal.

Over the last 27 years, the PPHO has recorded 8,324 cases of HIV – between 1989 and February 2016 – of which roughly half (4,278) contracted Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

Incidences of AIDS are more common among men at about 66 per cent. Over the years, there has been 1,886 fatal HIV-related cases on record, of which a staggering 94 per cent were AIDS-related.

Although the numbers are alarmingly high for a single province, local health officials said the figures didn't necessarily mean doom and gloom in paradise.

PPHO deputy chief Arnon Kaewbumrung said the diversity of the island's transient population means that many of the cases are not locals so the figures are distorted.

"It's not always easy to keep track of every single case, but we have been diligent in our record keeping over the years and that is one of the main reasons the highest figures in the country are recorded here," Dr Arnon told the *Gazette*.

"Our records are cumulative but the majority of people living in Phuket are not actually registered as Phuket residents. There are a lot of people – Thais and foreigners – coming in and out of Phuket on a regular basis.

Some of them contracted the virus elsewhere but were then tested in Phuket, which means they are also added to our database of all recorded cases," said Dr Arnon.

Dr Arnon stressed that the high number of AIDS cases in Phuket was not a bad omen.

"What's important is that we are keeping extensive records of

our patients and ensuring they have access to treatment. In the meantime, we are also making efforts to raise awareness of HIV and AIDS," he said.

PLAYING SAFE

The PPHO has distributed close to a million condoms to the general public over the past three years, including 94,900 handed out to teenagers as part of the 'Young Love' campaign.

Using condoms as protection is the most effective way to prevent the spread of the disease but there is still a negative attitude towards them, said Dr Arnon.

"Some people complain that using protection gives them an unnatural feeling, which discourages intimacy, while others feel unsure about the quality of condoms.

Others say using condoms leads to trust issues as they don't want their partners to think they have sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

"Attitudes need to change," he said.

"Even though it is common knowledge how devastating HIV and AIDS can be, yet how easy it is to take preventative measures, the stigma surrounding condom use means many people still won't take these simple steps to keep themselves safe.

Society labels condom use as a sign of promiscuity, when in fact, it is the smart and cautious thing to do," said Dr Arnon.

THE GAY COMMUNITY

People in the gay and transgender community in Phuket are the most at risk of contracting AIDS and a group the PPHO is concerned about.

"The incidences of HIV in this group is rising but they are the ones getting the least help from," said Dr Arnon.

A 2011 study found that increasing sexual activity among the youngest members of Phuket's transgender community was leading to an alarming rise in HIV rates.

Dr Sak Tanchaikul, former chief of PPHO, said he was deeply concerned about HIV infection rates among 'men who have sex with men', which his agency members refer to collectively as 'MSM'.

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attitudes and caring more

SEX EDUCATION

Sex is often an uncomfortable topic between parents and children, but experts feel that talking about it could make a huge difference in people's life-long attitudes towards sex.

"Sex education is very important for children. Parents must make it their duty to educate their children on the subject.

Unexpected pregnancies and STDs are common issues in Thailand, so parents must engage their children, particularly teenagers, in healthy and open-minded discussions about the subject," said Dr Arnon.

"It is easy to blame schools or friends for your children's behavior.

However, the primary responsibility always lies with parents – there are no excuses on that front."

TREATMENT

According to a recent report by the PPHO, there have been significant advancements in HIV medication in the past decade with over 30 known anti-virus treatments now available.

Since 2000, the Ministry of Public Health has been distributing anti-virus medications, and urging people to get tested and access their services.

They also reported that a new AIDS vaccine is in the research and development phase.

Experts want to banish the



The Life Home Project Foundation in Koh Sireh currently houses 30 people living with HIV, including 19 women and children. Photo: Gazette file.

notion that being diagnosed with HIV is necessarily a death sentence.

Thai AIDS Society experts reported a case where a man was diagnosed and started treatment for HIV in 1996, at the initial stage of the disease. He religiously followed his medication regime for more than a decade, and eventually tested negative for HIV in 2013.

Other studies have confirmed similar success stories worldwide, reaffirming the need for awareness and regular testing, the PPHO report said. Starting a treatment regime as early as possible enhances your chances of successful recovery.

BREAKING TABOOS

Being scared of getting tested

won't make the problem disappear – it will, in fact significantly reduce your chances of successful treatment, the report added.

Efforts to raise awareness and give people access to treatment have included the setting up of an AIDS hotline (1663), as well as children being allowed to be tested without having to get their parents' consent. However, HIV and AIDS remain taboo subjects in Phuket.

The PPHO report clearly states that living with an HIV/AIDS patient does not mean you will automatically contract the disease. Yet, those living with the reality of the disease know how difficult it is to change people's minds.

For those who cannot turn to family or friends, the Life Home Project Foundation in

Koh Sireh is a lifeline. The foundation provides free food, shelter, clothing, medication and even scholarships for children.

The foundation's project manager, Noppadol Pongpun, said many HIV-positive women are rejected by their families and communities, so we take care of them and their children at our centers.

"It's a better environment for the women and children to be in. Nobody treats them differently here," he said.

"We provide a venue for them to get advice and access to treatment. We also help women and children to adjust themselves in society. Our house can accommodate up to 30 people. Right now, we have 19 women and children living there. Some children are HIV patients themselves, whereas

others are orphans whose parents died of the disease.

"We also provide services to people who don't live at our shelters. There are those who initially lived here but moved out when they got better, both physically and emotionally, and were able to become contributing members of society," he said.

Mr Noppadol said that while cases of HIV are still on the rise, it is a subject that many still take lightly, emphasizing that HIV-positive patients don't always look haggard and worn. People mistakenly believe that HIV couldn't possibly have anything to do with them, but nobody can know for sure until they've been tested.

"HIV patients can live normally for a long time if they strictly follow their medication regime. We now have anti-virus medications that prevent transmission of the virus from mother to child during pregnancy.

"I am glad that both government and private sectors are providing support for HIV-patients. Additionally, there is a host of useful information available on the internet."

Mr Noppadol said that although society is gradually opening up on the subject of AIDS, it was, in his opinion, more important for patients to learn to live happy, healthy lives without being a danger to themselves or others around them.

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DESPITE having significantly fewer people, fewer cars, fewer motorbikes and fewer tour buses on the island ten years ago, the Songkran 'Days of Danger' safety goals were much more reasonable.

As has become the trend over the last few years, Phuket is joining the nation in a 'Seven Days of Danger' campaign this year with the unrealistic provincial goal of having zero road deaths. However, in the April 15-21, 2006 issue of the *Gazette* the goal was to have no more than four people die on the roads and no more than 53 people seriously injured during the 10-day campaign.

In 2004 and 2005, only three people died during the holiday campaign. However, hundreds were seriously injured. In recent years, with death tolls often outpacing the unrealistic goal of 'zero deaths' by day one of the campaign, even police officers seem to be throwing up their hands and saying, 'We're doing the best we can.'

Setting unrealistic goals in anything is a common mistake most of us suffer at the new year. How

many people made it to the Chinese New Year carrying on their New Year resolutions? Anyone make it to the Thai New Year? So, officials are suffering a common problem that has simply crept in somewhere over the last 10 years.

The real problem is that unrealistic goals mean we are accepting failure. Nobody, and I mean nobody in their right mind, will haul the Phuket police over the coals if someone dies on the roads during this year's safety campaign. With such an acceptance of failure, we are really only around the bend from creating an entire road-safety culture where failure is not only accepted, but expected.

As the April 15, 2006 issue of the *Gazette* went to print, we were already four days into the 10-day campaign with three dead and 43 injured. Unfortunately, sometimes we even fall short of realistic goals.

Though the goals have changed in Phuket over the years, some of the headlines haven't. "Dive industry 're-

The gift of hindsight

quires more regulations' – Palad," reads page two of the *Gazette* a decade ago. The ongoing battle to understand and regulate the dive industry was a point of contention even back in 2006, with officers claiming that because of the dive industry's importance to the tourism industry as a rich source of revenue, the government should regulate operators more rigorously.

The issue at the time – different from the current issue of diver safety, which has tarnished the industry within the last six months – was whether or not dive companies were being operated legally: were they registered businesses with Thai ownership, did they issue work permits for foreign employees, were they paying their taxes and so on.

"We don't think that these regulations [put in place to ensure dive shops are running legally] will deter dive operators from investing money in Thailand," said Phuket's Chief Administrative Officer (Palad) at the time.

"In the end, they'll thank us, because we'll get rid of the companies that give

the industry a bad name." Ten years later, it's easy to find lawfully registered dive company owners bemoaning the flyby operators that continue to damage the industry's reputation. So, the Palad's point remains valid.

"Unlike this issue of the *Gazette*, where the wet, wild fun of Songkran is ahead of us, the April 15, 2006 issue saw editors and reporters already in the thick of it.

So, in full Songkran spirit, the *Gazette* closed for the holidays – editors either ready for a well-deserved break or simply not willing to leave home for fear of being inundated with water. With the island's premier English-language media company's doors closed, there was no April 22 issue of the *Gazette*.

However, worry not. As internet and social media have stoked the flames for media consumption throughout the world, the *Gazette* editors won't abandon you for the holidays – they will ensure you can get the island's top stories on Facebook, online and, of course, in print. – Isaac Stone Simonelli

AMLO verifies 16 Thais are listed in leaked Panama Papers

SIXTEEN Thai people have so far been confirmed to be listed in the 'Panama Papers' – the huge trove of documents released recently that reveals individuals and entities from countries around the world who set up secret offshore accounts, the Anti-Money Laundering Organization (AMLO) reported on April 8.

Acting AMLO chief Seehanart Prayoonrat said Panama's anti-money laundering agency had responded to a request for clarification on this issue after unconfirmed reports of 21 Thais being identified in the documents.

Col Seehanart explained that further investigation was required to establish if the 16 individuals had committed any wrongdoing, especially if it involved money laundering.

However, The Nation reported that AMLO had found that there were a total of 719 names, including 411 Thais, 262 expatriates living in Thailand and 45 juristic persons associated with the Kingdom in the Panama Papers.

These people and entities could be legitimate investors and businessmen. If any people were suspected to be involved in money laundering, AMLO was empowered to investigate their assets but the agency would not make any public announcement, Col Seehanart noted.

According to AMLO, Thais and expatriates based here are shareholders, directors and beneficiaries of 48 offshore companies that used the Panama-based law firm Mossack Fonseca, from which the documents were leaked.

Most of the offshore shell firms have addresses in Bangkok and tourist resort provinces, such as Phuket.

None of the 16 Thais on the list were named.

Nine held over hospital raid

NINE suspects believed to be involved in three coordinated attacks, including seizing Joh I Rong Hospital in Narathiwat, were arrested.

Col Yutthanam Petmuang, deputy spokesman of the forward command of the Fourth Region's Internal Security Op-



erations Command, said the suspects confessed that uniforms found at a hideout were worn by the insurgents to blame the rangers for being 'responsible' for the attack.

Security officials identified 12 people believed to be involved in the raid and attack including the mastermind, the motorcyclist, a suspect who rode pillion and sprayed bullets at the ranger base and other collaborators.

The insurgents also attacked the 31 special operation unit at Joh I Rong Train Station and planted a bomb at Tambon Chuab to prevent reinforcement troops.

Coerced man hailed as hero, bailing on Yala bombing plan

IT WOULD have been the worst bomb attack to hit Yala Town had one innocent victim not chosen to put his and his wife's lives at risk to expose a malicious plot.

"Sunan Thongnet is our hero," Muang Yala District Chief (Palad) Kongsakul Jantrach declared on April 7.

Driving a pick-up truck laden with explosives into the town on April 5, Mr Sunan mustered enough courage to remove the shirt wired with explosives that he had been forced to wear and, upon arriving at the targeted Toyota plant, run and shout, "Run away. There are bombs in the vehicle."

NATIONAL NEWS Briefly

Mr Sunan acted, despite being worried about his wife, Renoo Jitbarn, who was being held hostage.

"They said that my wife and I would be safe if I drove the truck to the designated spot," the 53-year-old man said.

Mr Kongsakul said that thanks to Mr Sunan's timely warning, security officials were able to jam mobile-phone signals and cordon off the area to prevent the explosion.

An explosives ordinance

disposal (EOD) team arrived at the scene and successfully defused the bomb.

The district chief said the 180 kilograms of explosives inside the vehicle would have caused extensive damage and taken many lives if the bomb had detonated.

Nobody was killed or injured and Mrs Renoo was released safely.

A source disclosed that police had already identified three of the alleged kidnappers.

Banana workers contaminated

MANY workers at a Chinese-owned banana plantation in Chiang Rai have been contami-

nated with an unusually high level of chemicals – if recent blood tests are an indicator.

Officials tested the blood of 43 of the 200 workers, after reports of a sizeable number of banana-plantation workers in northern Laos falling sick. It is suspected that chemicals used by the Chinese firm were responsible.

Blood-test results by the Phaya Mengrai Hospital showed 10 of the workers were in a risky condition, while 13 had already reached unsafe contamination levels.

The hospital explained that further tests must be conducted, as these workers' behavior needed to be evaluated in detail as such levels of contamination might have arisen from eating unwashed vegetables.

Three jailed for forcing minor into Brunei sex industry

THREE Thai nationals were sentenced on April 6 to imprisonment, fines and strokes of the cane for their roles in exploiting a 17-year-old girl for prostitution in Brunei.

Having pleaded guilty to the charges on the previous day, each defendant was sentenced to serve four years in prison.

The 47-year-old female defendant, who is the aunt of the victim, was also fined 768,000 baht.

The two male defendants were each also fined 521,000 baht and 260,000 baht. Additionally, the male defendants were also sentenced to five and four strokes of the cane.



Skewing statistics: the positive and negative

THE recent revelation that Phuket has the highest reported incidence of human immunodeficiency virus infection and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/Aids) cases in Thailand should be a cause for concern and increased personal awareness, but not panic.

As pointed out by the Phuket Provincial Health Office, Thailand's province-based statistical reporting of national trends in the global HIV/Aids pandemic has been consistently skewed over the years by Phuket's enormous tourism industry – especially the huge population of workers, both Thai and foreign, that support it.

HIV/Aids incidence rates in Phuket are consistently distorted upward by the fact that the number of cases reported to the Ministry of Public Health is divided not by any reasonable estimate of the actual number of people in the province, but rather by the registered population of about 400,000.

This figure is dwarfed by the number of people who are here at any given time, especially during the high season. For the same reason, similar statistical outcomes can also be discounted year-in and year-out for other important socio-economic indicators, such as crime, road accidents and so on.

Thai government agencies have a long history of serving up inaccurate or misleading statistics. One example is the importance placed on various 'happiness indices' that rest on highly questionable statistical premises. As no such device as a 'happiness meter' exists, the only way to 'measure' this complex psychological state is completely subjective, through surveys in which respondents self-report their 'happiness'. One need not be a statistician to see the inherent flaws.

Unfortunately, the Thai media tends to use such statistics to generate sensational headlines rather than delve into how or why the data was collected.

Getting back to the HIV/Aids situation in Phuket, the good news is that the flawed statistics were released, rather than squelched.

Even more positive is the fact that the specter of HIV infection has greatly diminished since the first HIV strain was isolated. Now, people known to be infected with HIV generally get better treatment, both medically and from society-at-large – though we still have a long way to go on both fronts.



Criminal defamation cases, very strange

Re: Gazette online, Famous actor hit with computer crimes act in Phuket land case, April 9

What a strange law. You can sue if you think what was said or done might impact your business or reputation, rather than suing when you have proof that said defamation actually did cause your business harm.

Jim Scudder
Facebook

Pushing back at the rich and famous

Re: Gazette online, Famous actor hit with computer crimes act in Phuket land case, April 9

Famous people think they can get away with any and everything. It's about time someone stands up to them to protect what's theirs. But if Mr Puri is cleared of the otherwise harmful allegation, there is no reason to charge him.

Allison Smith
Chalong

Ending airport saga with pricey water is a horrible send-off

Re: Gazette online, Opinion: The conundrum of Phuket International Airport prices, April 10

I totally agree regarding the price of a bottle of water. The journey to the airport is bad enough, check-in lines are bad enough, going through immigration is worse, then when you finally have some breathing space, and all you want is

Letters to the Editor

Do you have an opinion to voice?
Email Editor@PhuketGazette.net

water, they bleed it out of you. Shame on you vendors.

Amara Forster
Facebook

Marine regulations need improvement

Re: Gazette online, On Deck: Dive ban to impact yachting, April 7

If the Ministry of Tourism and Sport regulated the local rules to the international rules at sea, and the local captains had international licenses to operate boats to take the public out to sea, this would help prevent many accidents due to negligence.

Until then, there will be no improvements.

Harry
Phuket Forum

Must focus on what is really dangerous

Re: Gazette online, On Deck: Dive ban to impact yachting, April 7

Well said, a similar situation has occurred with rock climbing, though it only took 'it looks dangerous, so it must be' to get that activity banned on Ko Yao Noi.

As you stated, there are nu-

merous other dangers to tourists totally ignored, most sensible people would find these decisions mind numbing.

Chris Moore
Facebook

Solve marine issues before next wave of pocket lining

Re: Gazette online, Promising prospects for Phuket marine industry, April 8

Why not start by fixing the problems the marine industry in Phuket already has (lack of moorings, boats throwing anchors on reefs, uneducated dangerous speedboat drivers and so on), instead of coming up with more money-making ventures to line the pockets of the few.

Phil Phelan
Facebook

Brake failure not blamed, finally!

Re: Gazette online, Fruit truck flips, spills load, makes squash on Kamala Hill, April 7

He 'lost control of the truck' – nice to read the obvious reason for a change. These guys start gunning it after climbing the hill and are on that first bend before they know it. No chance to blame 'brake failure' his time. He's lucky to be alive as there's a fair drop into that culvert.

Mister Ree
Phuket Forum

Phuket Gazette

In association with The Nation Multimedia Group PCL

Managing Editor: Isaac Stone Simonelli

Managing Director: Oranee Hildebrand
General Manager: Natthira Susangrat
Publisher: The Phuket Gazette Co Ltd

Contact us:

Editorial: news@phuketgazette.net
Advertising Sales: adsales@phuketgazette.net
Classified Advertising: classads@phuketgazette.net
Website services: anna@phuketgazette.net
Gazette Guide: guide@phuketgazette.net
Events Sponsorship: events@phuketgazette.net
General: info@phuketgazette.net

Telephone: 076 273555 (10 lines) Fax 076 615240
79/94 Moo 4, Thepkrasatri Rd, T. Koh Kaew, A. Muang, Phuket

The views expressed in the Phuket Gazette are those of the writers and contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Publisher, the Editor, the shareholders or the directors of The Phuket Gazette Co Ltd.

Volume 23 Issue 16

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Making illegal labor legal

FIRST PERSON

AS WE know, Phuket, along with the rest of Thailand, faces a myriad of migrant labor related issues, including foreign workers entering the country without permission.

To solve this issue, why don't we simply make them legal?

From my understanding, these workers do not want to work illegally. No one would willingly choose to work illegally if they could find a way to become legal.

The Thai government has limited the number of migrant workers allowed to enter the country and implemented many cumbersome procedures for registering migrant workers. I understand that this is for national security purposes and to protect local jobs from being taken over by foreigners, but as we can see, there is an increasingly high demand for migrant labor. This is especially true in Phuket, where many migrants are employed to work as fishing boat crew.

The government may well believe that limiting their numbers and complicating the registration process will reduce the number of foreign workers, but this often has the opposite effect. It causes more foreigners to end up working illegally in order to avoid all the hassle of getting legally registered.

Thailand is under pressure from the international community to solve the problems associated with illegally employing foreign laborers. They have no legal rights so they are easily exploited. Their basic human rights are violated by making them live in deplorable conditions and paying them



Kriengkrai Arpabuthsayapan is the head of Phuket Provincial Office of Labor Protection and Welfare, a position he has served in since May 2015. Hailing from Surin Province, Mr Kriengkrai has worked in many provinces during his 15-

year career. He graduated with a Master's Degree in Labor and Welfare Development from Thammasat University.

Here he talks about resolving problems related to illegal migrant laborers with less complex registration regulations.

less than the minimum wage.

We are trying our best to actively look for these illegal underground workers. When we fail to find them, it is easy to blame us and say we are not doing our job properly. Admittedly, Phuket is not that big, but they know how to hide when we conduct raids and so the problem continues to grow.

So why don't we simply bring them up from underground and make them all legal, providing them with social security, just like Thai workers? The economy will benefit, the laborers will have better lives and we will not get shamed in front of the international community anymore.

Additionally, it would be much easier to control their activities if they are legal.

A majority of the migrant laborers are not a threat to national security. If they are working legally and have a decent standard of living, there is no reason for them to turn to crime, but even if they do, we have police officers to control them.

Secondly, these workers are not here to steal Thai jobs as they procure the kind of work that Thai people are not interested in – physical labor. The obvious solution is to hire people from outside who are willing and able to do jobs that Thai people aren't.

These physical laborers are fundamental building blocks for Thailand. Lots of big business would not be able to function successfully without them. We should give them opportunities to work for us, rather than treating them like criminals.

I have suggested this idea in several meetings but no one really wants to take up the challenge as it goes against current government policy.

It is also very risky that we have no idea how many illegal workers live in Thailand.

So far, we have taken all the wrong steps to solve this issue, which end up making the problem even worse. I will keep pushing my ideas in meeting after meeting, hoping that somebody at the top will realize its potential benefits.



How some riders make it to old age is beyond me. Photo: Gazette file

Plea to Phuket bikers

I DON'T tend to be a conspiracy theorist. However, it is evident that motorbike drivers in Phuket have some sort of LINE or Facebook group in which they plot how to subtly commit suicide and irritate those of us with cars.

The only other explanation is the hundredth monkey effect, which is described on Wikipedia as "a purported phenomenon in which a new behavior or idea is claimed to spread rapidly by unexplained means from one group to all related groups once a critical number of members of one group exhibit the new behavior or acknowledge the new idea."

I recently saw an old man – the fact that he has made it to such a ripe age beguiles the imagination – ghost riding down the fast lane of Thepkraassatri Road, which is, without a doubt, the island's most dangerous stretch of asphalt. Tootling along in a relaxed manner with a toothpick hanging out of his mouth, the man was vexing anyone in a car, as well as filling them with the anxiety of possibly running him over – which would cause them to be terrible late to wherever they were headed.

If this was some sort of isolated event, it could be written off as Alzheimer's Disease, elderly confusion or simply as a psychotic disregard for one's own life and well-being. But it isn't. This old codger most

Island View

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

Do you have an opinion to voice? Email Editor@PhuketGazette.net

likely was pecking away at his smart phone in some LINE group scanning numerous suggestions on which method of motorbike transport would incite the most anxiety in those rich buffoons capable of buying a car or truck.

The standard consensus of course is that taking the entire family out ghost riding at night without headlights is the way to go, as any accident ups the ante for the oncoming motorist when it comes to them meeting god or being reincarnated.

It is almost as if tourists arriving on the island sign up for the group as a bit of a holiday laugh when they land at Phuket International Airport. Expats aren't exempt from dabbling in the dark art of antagonizing car drivers either. They are well aware that the swerving of a drunk driver on a motorbike can chill the heart of any oncoming drivers.

I beg. Hear me? I beg, motorbike drivers to stop. Stop with the focused attack on our mental and physical well-being. Stop, before the anxiety drives me into depression and my blood pressure takes me soaring to heavenly heights.

Words from the Wise

“One's philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes... and the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility.”

– Eleanor Roosevelt

“We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future.”

– George Bernard Shaw

Issues & Answers

How do I apply for a driver's licence renewal?

I HAVE lost my Thai driver's license and need to replace it. How long will the process take and what documents do I need to provide to the transport office?

Ms Payanisa Pornchanut of Phuket Land Transport Office replies:

Thank you for your query. The process depends on whether or not your licence was expired before you lost it.

If your licence has not expired then the entire process to

held at 10am everyday.

These are the documents you need to renew your licence:

1. Police report of the lost document;
2. Passport with the Visa page (both copy and original);
3. Work permit – if applicable (both copy and original);
4. Address verification from Immigration Office;
5. (Only for expired licences) Medical clearance certificate stating that you are fit to drive.

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issue a new one only takes about 10 to 20 minutes. If your licence has expired, you have to take a new training course. Training is

Rate cuts to boost SMEs

Banks	rate cut (percentage point)	new MLR (%)
Siam Commercial Bank	0.15	6.375
Kasikornbank	0.25	6.25
Krungthai Bank	0.25	6.275
TMB	0.25	6.775*
Bangkok Bank	0.25	6.25

* TMB cuts both MLR and MRR.

Cut in rates by major commercial banks. Image: Nation Graphics

THE surprise cut in lending rates by major banks will help reduce the financial burden of their business clients – small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in particular – as more than 50 per cent of business borrowers are on floating interest rates.

Kasikorn Research Centre’s head of money and banking, Thanyalak Vacharachaisurapol, said that the lending-rate cuts by commercial banks were another way to support SMEs, now that the country’s specialized financial institutions were focused on supporting consumption.

An analyst at KTB Securities (Thailand) said the rate cuts might show that the banks were facing lower loan growth, causing them to push demand by taking such action. – *The Nation*

What’s a contrarian to do now?

Finance

By David Mayes

IF YOU read my columns regularly, you know that I like to try to approach investing from a contrarian viewpoint. This basically means going against the current trend, or essentially buying things when they are beaten and battered down and selling when everyone else loves them and thinks the run will last forever. So, what does this mean in today’s market?

A lot of people are asking if China is a good bet; as a whole, it could stand a whole lot more battering before it would really be considered a value buy, without much remaining risk to the downside. If you look at the index as a whole in the chart (right), you can see we are pretty much in the middle of the range for the last decade. The middle of the range is generally not a great place to enter a market, although it is far better than buying near the top.

Individual stocks can be good value buys if you have the risk tolerance for making individual plays, which is not for most of



The chart indicates that we have been in the middle of the range for the last decade. Photo: www.tradingeconomics.com

you out there. However, a friend of mine recently put me on to HSBC shares in Hong Kong – these represent good value, trading at a Price to Earning (P/E) ratio of about nine, and paying out a gross dividend yield of about 8.5 per cent at the moment.

Steel has taken a beating recently and pundits are calling the recent rally off of those lows as a dead cat bounce. However, some stocks, such as US Steel, are trading at such lows that it is tough to imagine

them not being significantly higher in the next bull market. At the moment, there is no P/E ratio – as they are losing money. So, this play would not be for someone faint of heart, as they also only pay a dividend of about one per cent.

Another contrarian play one could make off of the low steel price would be to build on any empty land you have, since steel is one of the most important cost factors in the overall price of building. Of course not every-

one has a bunch of empty building plots sitting around, but if you do, now might be a good time to think about converting it into an income-generating property. You obviously need to factor in conditions in the local market; a big cause of the steel drop is that many markets have gotten way ahead of themselves in new construction. This is not always the best time to build, if you are worried about short term returns.

I don’t think we are in the environment yet where contrarian plays are found in abundance, but there are things you can do if you can handle the risk. For those of you with low risk tolerance, I would still conserve your cash for a proper crash. Rushing for a return now may significantly lower your overall returns in the future.

David Mayes MBA resides in Phuket and provides wealth management services to expatriates around the globe, focusing on UK pension transfers. He can be reached at david.m@faramond.com or 085-335 8573. Faramond UK is regulated by the FCA and provides advice on pensions and taxation.

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Not small fry for local fishermen

By Boonyawat Saelim

ANCHOVIES may be small fry, but they are big business for some fishermen operating out of Phuket's main fishing port.

Known locally as 'pla ching chang', anchovies have been a steady source of income for the last 40 years for fishing boat owner Kumnueng Dumead. However, business is not always plain sailing, especially during the rainy season.

"During the monsoon season it is very tough for us to get out and fish. Nonetheless, I still have to take care of my crew and their families, which includes feeding them and housing them," said Mr Kumnueng.

Mr Kumnueng's boat nets anywhere between 80,000 to 800,000 baht worth of fish every month, causing massive swings on his profit and loss statements, while his operating costs run at an average of 500,000 baht a month.

"Though this is an unpredictable business - we never know what fortunes or lack there of we will pull from the sea - this is what we were born to do. I can't imagine doing any other kind of work."

Despite the cost of living outpacing the increase in value for anchovies, which went for about 3.5 baht per kilogram 40 years ago and now fetches



These little dried fish are a month-to-month boom and bust business in Phuket. Photo: John Lodder

about 20 baht per kilo, Mr Kumnueng has no complaints.

"We've never had the market bottom out on us, and that's

what matters," he said.

Further up the food chain are the buyers at the dock, such as Pairuch Pengjan, who is a

member of the 'Anchovy Development Community' based in Rassada.

The Anchovy Development

Community was created after the 2004 tsunami as a way to build a stronger community and help generate the necessary income, explained Ms Pairuch.

"There are about 50 groups in Phuket that process anchovies. Just within our group there are 32 families," said Ms Pairuch.

The buyers take the fresh fish from the boats, dry them and then re-sell them for about 80 baht per kilo.

The fish are washed and then dried for about eight hours in the sun, before they are ready to be sold.

"Our fish are sold throughout Thailand and even in Malaysia and China," Ms Pairuch said.

Well known souvenir shop on the island, Prontip Phuket, is one of the many distributors of the dried anchovies.

"At our shop we sell many different kinds of anchovy products costing between 50 baht and 100 baht per package," said sales manager Natthaya Kraikoljanad. "Our best sellers are the plain ones, the ones with herbs added in to flavor them and those mixed with sesame."

The majority of end-buyers of the product are Thais, Chinese and Indonesians on group tours, said Ms Natthaya.

Additional reporting by Chutharat Plerin

Promising prospects for Phuket marine industry

WITH clear signals from the government that it is serious about transforming Phuket into an Asean marine leisure and yachting hub, key figures in the province's public and private business sectors are forging alliances to help bring that vision to fruition.

Marine business representatives, members of the Phuket Tourist Association, the Chamber of Commerce and local councilors met at the Phuket Merlin Hotel on April 1 to open discourse on how to move forward with the government-sponsored initiative to build more marinas in order to attract more marine-related businesses and tourists to the area.

The majority of business operators at the meeting were in agreement that more educational courses related to the marine industry - such as yacht



Private and public sectors to join forces for marine industry. Photo: Phukte Chamber of Commerce

maintenance and repair - should be made available at local colleges and universities.

Phuket Tourist Association Vice President Bhumikitti Ruktaengam applauded collaboration between the government and private sectors, stressing that it was essential for the two sectors to work in harmony in order to make the marine hub initiative a reality.

- Sukawin Tanthavanich



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Jungceylon Shopping Center, Patong, Phuket

Sassy summer styles go on stage at Jungceylon

Fashion models showed off the new lines of sassy summer styles from Quiksilver & Roxy Stay at the Port Zone, Jungceylon, on Mar 27. The "Summer Check In" fashion party was hosted by Phuket Square Co Ltd, the operator of Jungceylon shopping mall in Patong.



Phuket Square Co Ltd CEO Prawit Janyasithikul (center left) and QS Retail (Thailand) Limited General Manager Surached Mungthong (center right) and fashion models show off new summer styles on the catwalk. Photo: Phuket Andaman News

Trattoria team serve up Southern Italian journey

Foodies gathered at La Trattoria at Dusit Thani Laguna on March 25 to be taken on a 'Journey to the South of Italy' by the restaurant's food and beverage team, who paired five courses of fine fusion cuisine with award-winning wines from southern Italian wine growers cooperative Caldora Vini.



Caldora Vini sommelier Tamara Demeo (black dress) and Dusit Thani Laguna Phuket General Manager Prachoom Tantiprasertsuk with La Trattoria Food & Beverage team. Photo: Dusit Thani Laguna

Marriott green team restores 57,000sqm mangrove forest

About 250 associates from all four Marriott hotels in Phuket gathered at Thap Pla Village in Phang Nga on March 15 plant 2,700 mangrove pods as part of a mangrove restoration project jointly launched earlier in the year by JW Marriott, Renaissance Phuket, JW Khao Lak and the Phuket Marriott Resort and Spa, Nai Yang Beach. The project area covers 3,580 rai (57,280km²) The team also planted 300 young white bean trees.



Marriott associates planting some of the 2,700 young mangrove pods.

HeadStart cleans Kata Beach

More than 50 HeadStart International School staff, students and their parents, in partnership with Boathouse Hotel and Surf House Phuket, gathered on Kata Beach for their first beach clean up activity of the year on March 19.

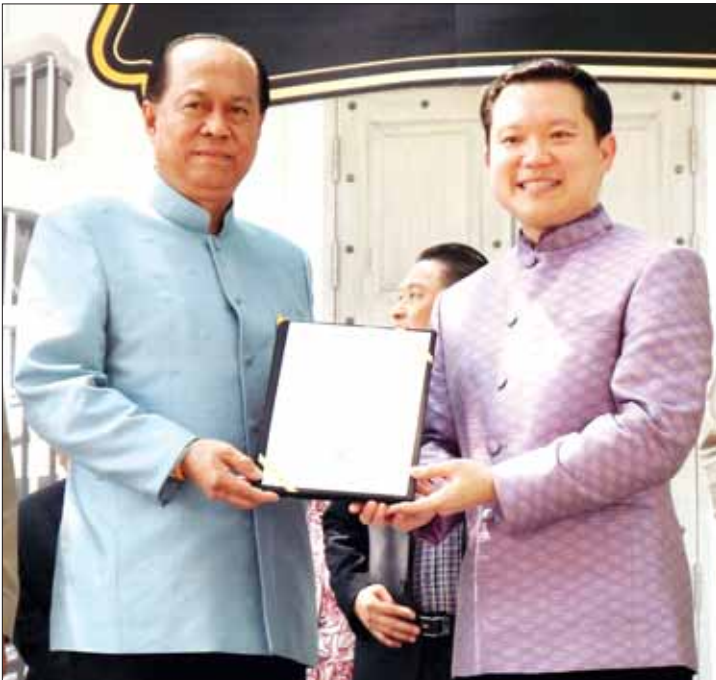


HeadStart International School students and parents with bags of rubbish collected on Kata Beach.

ents in Paradise

Royal photography expo

Exhibitions featuring 60 photographs of Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn taken by the president of the Royal Photographic Society of Thailand, Nitikorn Kraivichien, opened at the Peranakannit Museum Phuket and The Memory at On On Hotel on April 1. The exhibitions, supported by Thai Beverage PCL (ThaiBev), commemorate the princess' 61st birthday anniversary and are open to the public until April 30. Admission to the exhibitions is free.



Thapana Siriwattanakdee, Managing Director of Thai Beverage PCL (right) and Interior Minister Gen Anupong Phaojinda. Photo: Thai Asean News Associated Press.

TAT aims to attract top tourists with Thainess

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) held the Amazing Thailand Luxury Trade Meet 2016 on Mar 31 at Amanpuri Phuket. The aim of the conference was to enhance the image of Thailand as a quality leisure destination appealing to the high-end tourist market by promoting 'Thainess' as well as raising awareness of Thailand's luxury tourism products and services.



(From L-R) TAT Phuket Director Anoma Wongyai; TAT East Asia Region Executive Director Runjuan Tongrut; and Amanpuri Rooms Division Manager Yuki Yamano.

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Where's the new generation of sailors?

By Ghislaine Bovy

IT'S amazing how the 'Good old days' stories kept popping up as I enjoyed after-race drinks at the Phuket Yacht Club (PYC).

I could overhear, again: "Wow, the old sailors are really into it (as always), but what about the new generation? Where are they?"

Well, they really are right under our noses, but are hardly seen or heard of. The reason is simply because all the stories, articles and online posts on regattas usually highlight boat names, the owners and the skippers, rarely is the crew mentioned – and guess where that new generation of sailors is... the crew, of course.

Mind you, that's not always true, you can occasionally find the younger generation at the helm. That's the case with Patinyakorn 'Ging' Buranrom. I first interviewed Ging in



Up-and-coming Thai sailors at the Phuket Youth Sailing Club. Photo: Gazette file

Bangkok back in 2013; what struck me is how passionate he was and still is. Having participated in the TRANSPAC as the

first-ever Thai entry, Ging is now looking for new, challenging international races while enjoying and winning regional

regattas.

Ging also has an eagerness to bring sailing to more Thais, as a sport and hobby.

"Sailing is a very healthy sport and perfect to develop personal skills and teamwork," says Ging.

And, talking about very young sailors, I have enormous respect for Katy Gooch Firmin and her husband Paul for coaching young Thai sailors – and that includes taking them to Wales for the Topper World Championship last year.

The young boys are 'learning life through sailing' as Katy so nicely puts it. They are orphans from the Sunshine Village and would never have had the opportunity to sail without Katy and her husband. The couple decided to teach these youngsters how to sail as a healthy activity, and a few years later, the boys are successfully competing in the National Optimist and Laser races throughout the region.

There you go, a next generation of Thai sailors ready to ride the waves!

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And let's not forget the 'younger' expat sailors



Meike Lange (left) and Elizabeth Schoch racing in the Multihull Solutions Regatta Phuket 2015. Photo: Ghislaine Bovy

THERE are also plenty of young expats around that bring their own passion into the Southeast Asia regattas and races.

Want a few names?

Elizabeth Schoch, known as Liz to most, and her boyfriend, Alfie, who often crew on competing boats. They are true enthusiasts and communicate their passion for sailing with great vigor.

How about Mig Wehrle and Meike Lange? Owners of *Aqua* and both from Germany, they join all PYC Sunday races and crew multihulls such as *Blue Nose*, for Meike, and *Hurricane* for Mig at regional regattas.

Last, but not least, three young fellows I met last December, Jasper Touchant from my home country Belgium, Thomas Cracknell from the UK

and Gav Montanaro from Australia, all keen to be crew members and are absolutely brilliant on the water, as they proved at the 2015 Multihull Solutions Regatta.

Talking to a friend of mine from Corsair Marine in the prize-giving party that evening, I realized that both generations are key to the success of competitive sailing. The 'old', but young at heart sailors have the purchasing power to have their own boats and the experience to be at the helm, while the younger generations offer strong arms, legs and a 'risk-taking' spirit that makes them winners.

I'm sure I forgot to mention some more young sailors, so my apologies for that, but then again, I'm just an old sailor myself.

- Ghislaine Bovy

Platus on the comeback trail



On Deck

By Duncan Worthington

PHUKET'S smallest sports boat is set to make a comeback. The 25-foot Platu was once a favorite around Phuket and in the not-so-distant past there was a large fleet of Platus that used to turn out regularly for the iconic regattas and club racing. Six Platus were once under the management of Sunsail and Phuket was even host to the National Championships, but over the years their presence on the local regatta circuit has waned.

After the Platus were sold off to private owners, the much-heralded Phuket 8 sports boat stole the headlines, and then, much like its predecessor, quietly sailed over the horizon rarely to be heard of again. All the while, a few privately owned Platus remained in Phuket, some col-

lecting dust, others being used as training boats.

The Gulf of Thailand has, to be fair, long been the home of the largest fleet of Platus in Asia and indeed Pranburi was where it all started.

The 25-foot Farr-designed Platu was the brainchild of a group of Thai businessmen who asked the famous yacht designer Bruce Farr to design a racing yacht especially suited to the waters of Thailand. The first boats were built at McDell Marine in New Zealand before being shipped to Pranburi in 1995 where the first Platu Coronation Cup took place in 1996 and has taken place annually ever since.

The Platu's popularity has ebbed and flowed over the years, but recently there has been revitalized interest in these highly competitive pocket-rockets.

Local stalwart, Scott Duncanson, a former Phuket 8 owner and now avid Platu



One-design can produce some of the closest racing. Photo by Guy Nowell

sailor, regularly travels to Pattaya to take part in the Platu racing there, but perhaps soon Duncanson and like-minded sports boaters will no longer

need to clock up the air miles.

With a concerted effort by a few keen sailors from Phuket and Pattaya, the one-design scene is about to be reborn in Phuket.

According to the organizers a new three event series is to be launched in Phuket, including the Cape Panwa Hotel Phuket Raceweek, Phuket King's Cup Regatta and another event yet to be named.

All Platus will be provided in racing trim, compliant with the Platu Class Rules 2011 and all fitted with 'controlled' sails, the goal being to provide true one-design racing.

Will this be the re-birth of the Platu? Will Phuket be home to a true one-design mono-hull series? Watch this space for updates.

Duncan Worthington is a long time Phuket resident and through Infinity Communications (www.infinity-comms.com) consults to leading consumer brands, hospitality and marine clients in Thailand. In his 'spare time' he runs the marine portal www.MarineScene.asia. #OnDeckPhuket

Big sales at Dubai boat show



A number of big price-tag boats were sold at the boat show in Dubai this year. Photo: Dubai International Boat Show

THE Dubai International Boat Show reported high attendance, vast international reach and strong sales for the 23rd edition of the show, which wrapped up early last month.

UAE-based Al Shaali Marine, who unveiled the AS 100 superyacht this year, valued at about 192 million baht, was expecting the show to lead to the sale of at least three superyachts and seven medium-sized boats.

"We know that Dubai International Boat Show draws serious buyers, and this year has been no exception," said Sultan Al Shaali, the CEO of Al Shaali Group.

The new and deluxe 77 Enclosed Flybridge from Riviera, touted as the largest, most luxurious and most technologically

advanced Riviera ever and unveiled to the Middle East for the first time at the show, was sold on day four through its exclusive regional distributor, SF Yachts.

San Lorenzo Middle East, represented by ACE Marine, also confirmed the sale of their 26.45m SL 86, worth about 225mn baht in the first three days of the show.

"It has been a very productive boat show with great results so far, and has given us the exposure we were expecting. There has been a constant flow of very serious, high net worth prospects from the UAE and GCC countries, and we are already looking forward to the next boat show," said Tarek Khalil, the managing director of ACE Marine.

- *Phuket Gazette*

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CrossFit beast advances to Australia

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

PHUKET-trained CrossFit beast, 28-year-old Elise Hoefsmit, took top honors in Thailand in the Reebok CrossFit Games 2016 Open, advancing her to the regional competition in Sydney this May.

"I'm over the moon. I put in hours of work to get to this point and I'm just beginning. You can't fake hard work and it certainly pays off," Ms Hoefsmit told the *Gazette*.

The annual CrossFit Games are broken down into three parts, with the first stage being the Open, which is a five-week, five-workout competition – the kicker is that the workouts remain a secret until they are released on a Thursday, giving athletes until the following Monday to submit a score.

"Athletes train year-round for a competition that is almost completely a mystery," the CrossFit Games website points out.

Then the top athletes from each of the 17 regions qualify for the second stage of the competition—regionals. The regionals are live, three-day competitions. The top five advance to the StubHub Center in the United States for a final showdown.

"When they reach the StubHub Center, they put their training and mental fortitude to the test and take on a rigorous, broad-ranging test of overall physical capacity. After four days, the Fittest on Earth will have clearly distinguished



Elise Hoefsmit has also picked up rock climbing since arriving in Phuket. Photo: Yok Chaiwat

themselves," the website says. So far, Ms Hoefsmit has distinguished herself without a doubt – finishing 4th in all of Asia.

"Before this I was focused on body building and powerlifting. I really started to take CrossFit seriously on moving to Thailand in July last year," Ms Hoefsmit said. "I've always changed up my training every few years and looked for

new ways to progress my athletics. After moving to Thailand to work at Unit 27, my boyfriend [Luke Richmond, who is currently on the Row2Rio team] convinced me that CrossFit would be an exciting new challenge for me. He was right! I was hooked."

CrossFit is designed to test every aspect of an athlete's fitness, which sees Ms Hoefsmit combining Olympic weight-

lifting, powerlifting, gymnastics and conditioning, in order to be ready for anything that may get thrown at her in competitions like the Open.

"My nutrition plays a huge role in allowing me to perform at my best every day. I've found that the biggest change in my strength and recovery happened when I started eating more and getting my nutrition right for the amount of work I

was doing," she said.

Having competed in powerlifting and bodybuilding at a high level in Australia, Ms Hoefsmit entered her first CrossFit competition in Chiang Mai last September, finishing in 2nd place.

With regionals about a month away, there isn't a lot Ms Hoefsmit can do to ensure a win.

"Become superwoman? I will compete against women who have been doing CrossFit for 10 years. To win in my first year competing would be sensational, but realistically top 25 is my goal. However, it's all about the workouts," she said.

The 40 women competitors, 10 selected from Asia and 30 from Australia, won't be told what the workouts will be until just two weeks before the competition, which takes place on May 13-15.

"With competitions like this, the hard work is done in the years prior to the competition, not the few weeks before. There are skills that I can perfect and become more proficient at, but in terms of gaining more strength, you don't have enough time to add to your current base," Ms Hoefsmit said.

Though back in Australia for the competition and a number of other adventures, Ms Hoefsmit hasn't abandoned Phuket. The 28-year-old CrossFit trainer plans to return to working with clients at Unit27, as well as building on her base for next year's CrossFit Games.

Row2Rio team pushes deep into Atlantic

BATTERED by waves, flying fish and brutal heat, the adventurers of Row2Rio left the African coastline, pulling themselves through the middle of the Atlantic in their pioneer voyage from Portugal to Brazil.

"30 days doing two hours on, two hours off – it sounds ridiculous when I say it," wrote Luke Richmond, Aussie expat and head coach at Unit27 in Phuket, last week.

"Yesterday was another brutally hot day with minimal wind or current. We took the opportunity at midday to go through much needed maintenance. The bottom of the boat needed a scrape to get off all the barnacles and little organisms that have been hitchhiking with us. It's surprising how much speed these little critters can steal from you. A check of all nuts and bolts on deck to ensure that everything is functioning properly."

The team has now covered more than

1,800 nautical miles, putting them far beyond the halfway point in their adventure to honor the Olympics and raise funds for Macmillan Cancer Support. However, the Doldrums dealt out significant mental and physical punishments for the four rowers: Mr Richmond, Susannah Cass, Mel Parker and Jake Heath.

Mr Richmond confessed to struggling in the Doldrums.

"Without being able to see the waves, the oars were getting yanked in all directions and my body took a hammering. I get so frustrated at times that I throw the oars down and just sit for a while. After I calm down and see Mel or Susannah, whoever is on shift with me at that time, still rowing in these ugly conditions, I feel guilty for throwing a little tantrum and take up the oars again. This cycle will repeat itself many times throughout the night," Mr Rich-



Phuket CrossFit trainer Luke Richmond. Photo: Row2Rio

mond wrote.

Adding to the chaos of the night shift were flying fish, which were just another hazard for the rowers. One reportedly knocked Ms Parker in the head and Mr Richmond was slammed in the back.

Fatigue has set in and the rowers' bodies have begun to change, as resources are pulled from unessential

muscle groups.

"I have done a body evaluation today – my calves have decided to pack up and go on holiday. I think half of my quads have gone with them. It seems that any muscle tissue that isn't being used for this specific task has been consumed for energy," wrote Mr Richmond last week.

Though the heat at the equator is brutal, forcing the entire team to be hyper-aware of signs of heat exhaustion, dehydration and sunburn, the days of the rowers are also filled with unadulterated beauty.

"We are in the middle of one of the most beautiful places on our earth. The sunrises are amazing and the stars fill the sky from horizon to horizon. Every morning, I wake up truly grateful to be part of this crazy adventure," wrote Mr Richmond.

– Isaac Stone Simonelli

Sceptered Isle: Speedboats, sun-loungers and jet-skiers



I RECENTLY drove along Rawai beach road, and counted the number of speedboats hoovering up passengers for island day-trips to Koh Phi Phi and Racha. There were 27, mostly belonging to one company. Later that day, I took the ravishingly beautiful route around Promthep Cape, down the twisting road to Nai Harn beach and on to secluded Ao Sane. Secluded? Or so I had always thought. In fact, numerous vehicles had made the hazardous trip along the narrow headland road, and the steep slope directly behind the beach, bulldozed to create an artificial sandy beach, was crammed with sunbeds. I counted 62. What a transformation.

“So what?” you may snort. “It’s high season. And these are holiday venues worth visiting”. True and true again. But my point is this. A great deal has been written about the need to preserve the island’s unique natural heritage.

Often such outpourings have come after shocking incidents at sea – the discovery of a mangled porpoise or an amputee turtle; worse, the demise of a rare dugong, or most recently a human snorkeler. Sometimes, nylon nets are the culprits, but all too often mutilation or death is caused by the propeller of a recklessly driven speedboat. They are not called ‘speed-



Despite government offices touting the ‘natural beauty’ of Phuket, many island beaches are cluttered with tourist activities that do little to preserve this beauty. Photo: Isaac Stone Simonelli

boats’ for nothing.

And even when the outboards are turned off, these people-carriers still wreak havoc with the marine environment. On the afflicted coral reefs of Racha, you can see the gouging effect of anchors carelessly tossed among the delicate coral; the walkways cut through the reefs, and the impact of trampling feet as passengers wade ashore.

Talking of motorized water transport, there was a powerful lobby intent on banishing jet-skis from Phuket, after so many unsavory incidents involving collisions and injuries, or extortion scams for “damaged” equipment.

Yet at this very moment, Patong has jet skis galore, hurtling around the bay, or lined up for the next unsuspecting customer. Another accident waiting to happen?

On the other hand, there has, to my knowledge, never been any systematic attempt, either to enforce existing power boat regulations, or better to re-write the book and make the rules stricter. Surely it’s time for draconian measures, if only to regulate proliferating numbers at pick-up points such as Chalong and Rawai, and to control precisely where they can go and drop anchor and at what speed.

As for the seaside issue, we understood that Phuket’s beaches were to be returned to their former pristine glory. In fairness, this *has* happened at many venues, where 10 per cent zones for umbrella vendors have been established. Nai Harn no longer has encroaching restaurants among the casuarina groves, its beach is free of hired sun-loungers.

Despite a partial December

reprieve, prompt action has been taken at Surin Beach to remove illegal structures such as restaurants and even nightclubs.

Even better, Freedom, Nui and Lay Pang beaches are to be declared ‘virgin’ areas with no commercial clutter at all. Returned to the people, the notion of the ‘private beach’ has apparently all but vanished. Life guards have returned with a startling drop in sea-side drownings. Better still, some beaches have better rubbish disposal facilities, even if public showers and toilets still seem some way off.

And yet.... Why is Ao Sane apparently immune to such strictures?

If you have gardening or environmental concerns, contact Patrick at drpaccampbell@gmail.com. Many of his creative and academic publications can be found at his website: Green galoshes Wordpress.



Celebrate Earth Day by planting trees. Photo: Public Domain

Earth Day 2016 on the horizon

NEXT week, more than one billion people in 192 countries will take action to protect our shared environment. All across the globe, in big cities to small villages and everything in-between, people are organizing, demanding climate action, cleaning up their local communities, meeting with their elected officials, planting trees, and teaching their children to protect our planet.

This year, in a rare and special event, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has invited every world leader to the United Nations to officially sign the Paris Climate Agreement. It is no coincidence that the agreement is being opened for signatures on April 22, Earth Day.

Also this year, Earth Day Network (EDN) is focusing on the urgent need to plant new trees and forests worldwide. As EDN begins the four year count down to Earth Day’s 50th anniversary in 2020, EDN is pledging to plant 7.8 billion trees worldwide – one for every person on Earth.

– Earth Day Network

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Phuket Gazette

Unusual times in Phuket

'Millenials' may be the new tourism demographic to target



A TYPICAL 'high season' in Phuket is usually from November to April every year, with the 'peak season' being December and January. However, this has not been the case for 2015/2016, where the high season and peak season has passed by hitting a large speed bump. Nearly every business on the island – tour companies, sailboat hires, hair & nail salons, massage shops and restaurants – have complained of a slow and quiet season.

Traditionally, most businesses on the island make enough money in the high season to cover overheads and expenses during the low season, until the next high season is upon them again. With a poor high season gone past, most business owners have very little to tide themselves over the low season.

Dependency on high season business alone is no longer sufficient to sustain any business throughout the year. New strategies and new markets for the low season



Millenials pay close attention to reviews on websites such as TripAdvisor. Photo: Travelarz

and diversification for both seasons throughout the year should be sought. Even marketing strategies have to adapt to the changed markets, with marketers now seeking consumers on social media platforms through creative and engaging content. Clever marketing, aimed at the experience seeking generation of travellers from Asia's emerging markets, could make up for the numbers in the low season.

This new generation of

travellers, better known as 'Millennials', is a growing market segment with a unique influence through social media. Millennial is defined by Wikimedia as the Millennial Generation or Generation Y and is the demographic cohort following Generation X. There are no precise dates for when the generation starts and ends; most researchers and commentators use birth years ranging from the early 1980s to around 2000.

Millennials wield substantial

online influence by sharing information, opinions and feedback, and where such user generated contents are 'trusted'. A poor feedback or review by any traveller, especially on the world's largest travel website, TripAdvisor, could be detrimental to any business or property owner. Just one negative comment could affect potential clients and take a while to recover from. It is no surprise that hotels and rental agencies have invested in a large IT team to

create interesting and up to date content for all forms of social media.

Similarly, for individual property owners, depending on rentals during the high season alone may no longer be sufficient, and opening up the opportunity to cater to the new breed of travellers will be an interesting prospect.

Even without the backing of a large IT team to promote their properties, individual property owners could start by setting up a website featuring their property. The website can then be used to point out real estate agents and service providers to potential clients, as well as serve as a platform where all the relevant photos and other important information regarding the property is featured.

Listings with websites such as TripAdvisor, Airbnb, Flipkey and the like could also help owners widen their reach for potential clients and tap into the market for Millennial travellers.

Amy Koh is the sales manager of Engel & Voelkers Phuket. To contact Amy or for more information, visit www.engelvoelkers.com/en/phuket

Another service city project to be developed in Vietnam

AMATA VN, the major industrial estate developer in Vietnam and a subsidiary of Amata Corporation Pcl. ("AMATA"), has been granted the second licence to develop the Amata Service City Long Thanh 1 on 346rai of land near Ho Chi Minh City, expecting to start operating it in 2018.

Somhatai Panichewa, chief executive officer, said that the area accounted for 53 per cent of the total area of 649.25rai. The company applied for the licences in Dong Nai province.

Construction of the US\$23 million (810mn baht) project, including a residential area, commercial area, warehouse and logistics system, is expected to commence in 2018 and be completed in 2019, when the land will be ready for



The service city by Amata Vn is part of a larger industrial and residential estate. Image: Amata

investment from private investors, both local and foreign.

The project is in a strategic location to support air, marine and land logistics transport. It is adjacent to Amata City Bien Hoa, the company's first industrial estate in Vietnam. That will help link the supply chains of the two industrial estates, Ms Somhatai said.

It is also near Long Thanh

International Airport, which would make things easier for investors.

The first licence was granted last year for developing the Amata City Long Thanh (high-tech real-estate) project on 2,562rai. It is expected to be ready for investment next year.

The project is a part of a plan to build industrial-estate and residential areas covering more than 7,900rai.

The two licences are among four it has applied for. The last two are expected to be granted next quarter.

They are for the development of Amata City Long Thanh and Amata Service City Long Thanh 2 on 303 rai and another Amata Township Long Thanh on 4,706.25 rai.

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- Promoting and marketing the business
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- Maintaining statistical and financial records
- Setting and achieving sales and profit targets
- Analyzing sales figures and devising marketing and revenue management strategies
- Recruiting, training and monitoring staff
- Planning work schedules for individuals and teams
- Meeting and greeting customers
- Dealing with customer complaints and comments
- Addressing problems and troubleshooting
- Ensuring events and conferences run smoothly
- Supervising maintenance, supplies, renovations and furnishings
- Dealing with contractors and suppliers
- Ensuring security is effective
- Carrying out inspections of property and services
- Ensuring compliance with licensing laws, health and safety and other statutory regulations
- Experience with references in Asia or Thailand

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- Keep up to date with current promotions and hotel pricing, provide information to guests on request while maximizing bedroom sales opportunities
- Supervise reservations and allocation of bedrooms with the Executive Housekeeper
- Monitor customer's accounts and till accounts
- Excellent verbal and written English communication skills
- Over 1 year experience will be advantage

Bartender

- Prepare alcohol or non-alcohol drinks
- Interact with customers, take orders and serve snacks and drinks
- Assess customers' needs, preferences and make recommendations
- Mix ingredients to prepare cocktails
- Restock and replenish bar inventories and supplies
- Comply with all food and beverage regulations

Housekeeping Supervisor

- Oversee the work of housekeeping staff
- Inspect guest rooms before checking in
- Supervise room cleaning and replenishing duties
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- Ensure training of new hires
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Phuket Gazette

Redefining the path to success

By Sahar Aftab Paliwala

PRACHOOM Tantiprasertsuk has made her mark as a female general manager in the largely male dominated Phuket hospitality industry, and has done it with an ease and elegance entirely her own. Her unassuming demeanor belies her very real, very lofty accomplishments – becoming one of the youngest female hotel directors in Thailand when she was less than 27 years of age.

Ms Prachoom studied Hotel Management from London City College and jumped right into the hospitality industry on her return to Thailand. With brands such as JW Marriott, Marriott Hotels Riverside, Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok (now rebranded to Anantara), Hotel Shangrila, Hotel Peninsula and Dusit Thani Laguna Phuket under her belt, Ms Prachoom has overcome obstacles effortlessly.

Ms Prachoom says that being a female general manager is a challenge at times, but can also be advantageous. She feels she possesses a softer and more patient approach as a woman, but being a long time profes-

sional in the industry has taught her how to deploy a tougher approach if needed.

She believes working in the hospitality industry is her one true calling. “I was born to be an hotelier,” she says. “I think the greatest reward for me in my career is to see the happy, smiling faces of returning guests”.

Guest interaction is a crucial aspect of her job. “I want every guest who stays here to feel like they’re coming back home,” Ms Prachoom said. “I try to promote a lively and friendly atmosphere – like a big warm family where everyone knows each other.”

Ms Prachoom is proud of her accomplishments – not only for achieving what so many women in the industry only dream of, but also because she believes she is making a contribution toward her country. “Being a Thai, I’m proud of what I’m doing. I believe that I’m an ambassador for my country.”

However, it hasn’t been an easy ride all the way, she admits. “Being a single mother and working such tough hours

took its toll on me at times. It is especially difficult working in hospitality because you never know what to expect and there are no ‘business’ hours. You have to cater to guests’ needs at all times. I sometimes find it difficult to balance my personal and professional life, but I consider myself very lucky to have supportive parents who helped me.”

Her advice to young, aspiring individuals is to grab every opportunity that they come across. “I don’t pretend to be very clever or a great person, but I am the sort who never lets go of an opportunity. If I fail, then so be it. It doesn’t matter because another opportunity will come along soon. The important thing is that you must never give up, and set yourself goals for what you want to accomplish. Not setting goals is like running a marathon but not knowing where you’re going; you will obviously get tired and want to give up.”

Ms Prachoom believes in continuous self improvement as the only way to move forward. “I spend my time training people who work in hospital-

ity. You should never stop learning, no matter how old you are. When you commit to work towards something, give it your absolute best, or don’t do it at all. That’s how I have carried myself from the very beginning. Every day I ask myself if I am content with what I’ve done, and if the answer is no, I go back and do it all over again.”

Rendering: Adriano Trapani





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ISSN 1905 - 8268

