

BACK TO SCHOOL

A SAIPAN TRIBUNE SPECIAL ADVERTISING FEATURE

08 | 12 | 22

Three Rota residents recognized for their heroism

The CNMI administration, in partnership with the Rota municipality and Homeland Security and Emergency Management, presented plaques of appreciation to three men on Rota for saving a drowning boy last July 29.

Manglona, Damien J. Hocog, and Tyric Castro received plaques of appreciation for saving a young Filipino boy at the Prudential Manglona Park Beach last July 29.

Speaking on behalf of the CNMI administration, Dennis Mendiola, special as-

stant for Homeland Security and Emergency Management, commended the courage and bravery of the men.

“Gov. Ralph DLG Torres and I are strong advocates of our people helping each other, especially during our times of need. These three young heroes—Tyric Castro, Mamet Manglona, and Damian Atalig—demonstrated the principles and values instilled in them by their family. We commend their acts of courage and bravery, especially coming from young individuals with no train-

ing,” he said.

Mendiola added that these individuals are an inspiration to the community as they remind everyone of the importance of helping one another.

“Although we caution people from putting their lives in danger, our culture and strong family values of protecting one another often trumps protocol and procedures. These three individuals’ act of courage will not be overlooked. As a matter



Mendiola

of fact, when I presented the incident to Gov. Torres, he insisted that we commend these young heroes in an effort to inspire and remind our community of the importance of helping one another in times of need.

On behalf of CNMI Homeland Security and Emergency Management, we extend our sincere appreciation to our young heroes and their families,” he said.

Before awarding the

plaques, Mendiola told the men that they demonstrated tremendous value and character “by putting your own life in danger to ensure the safety of another individual. We want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your great deed, which does not go unnoticed.”

(Kimberly B. Esmores)

Woman suing Saipan Mayor’s Office, employee for collision

By **KIMBERLY A. BAUTISTA**
kimberly_bautista@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

A female motorist has filed a lawsuit against the Saipan Mayor’s Office, one of its employees, and the CNMI government after one of the Saipan Mayor’s Office’s heavy equipment machines collided with her car in February 2021.

Emeelourd Udani, through David Banes, is suing the Saipan Mayor’s office, employee Mariano Aguon, and the CNMI government after a heavy equipment that Aguon was driving allegedly backed into her car.

Udani presented her claim to the Commonwealth government through the Office of the Attorney General, alleging negligence on the defendants’ part prior to filing her lawsuit.

However, on July 8, 2022, the AG’s office informed Udani that her claim was denied, claiming that employees of the mayor’s office are not employees of the Commonwealth government within the meaning of the Government Liability Act.

According to Banes, though, the court held in Fleming v. Office of the Mayor of Saipan, Civil Case No. 14- 0147 that employees of the mayor’s office are employees of the Commonwealth government.

“The mayor’s office is named as a co-defendant in the event that Aguon is not an employee of the Commonwealth government, while the Commonwealth government is named as a co-defendant in the event that Aguon is a Commonwealth employee covered by the Government Liability Act,” he said.

According to the complaint, Udani was driving on a public road in Chalan Kiya south of

Saipan Health Clinic to pick up her son from Green Meadow School on Feb. 12, 2021, at around 3pm. At that time, Aguon, an employee of the Saipan Mayor’s Office, was driving a heavy equipment on the same public road in front of Udani. Aguon was in the Chalan Kiya area with co-workers conducting a cleanup along the public road. Like Udani, Aguon was heading in the direction of GMS.

As a result, Udani followed Aguon’s heavy equipment at a distance. But when Aguon was near GMS, he suddenly reversed the heavy equipment and backed up toward Udani. Aguon did not notice Udani’s vehicle behind him.

According to her lawsuit, Udani immediately started honking and shouting in order to get Aguon’s attention, but he still did not notice Udani’s vehicle and kept reversing.

As a result, the heavy equipment backed into the front of Udani’s vehicle, and the claw of the heavy equipment struck her vehicle.

The collision seriously damaged Udani’s vehicle, including leaving a heavy dent on its hood and destroying its headlight.

Udani claims that the collision also caused her severe emotional distress.

In addition, at the time of the collision, Udani was not yet the record owner of her vehicle as she was buying it from a third party and was following a payment schedule.

As a result of the accident, the vehicle needed significant repairs, which essentially caused Udani to lose the use of the vehicle and the payments she had already made to buy it, the complaint said.

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Preparing your child for school after COVID-19

By **TERI M. FLORES**
CORRESPONDENT

Its back-to-school season again and the familiar, combined feelings of excitement and nervousness is back in the air. Two years into the COVID-19 pandemic and we are all still trying to understand, adapt, and accept that remote and hybrid learning will now be a part of our daily routine—both for parents and for our school-aged children.

The reality now among families with school-aged children is how to continue



Maricar Manicdao Guintu, center, supervises as her children prepare for the start of classes. It's become a Guintu family tradition to gather her children together—college student Fredric Dean and Saipan International School students Michael Jan and Milarose Jeanne—to prepare their school supplies, which she said is a good bonding moment for the family.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

being flexible and to adjust quickly when there is an immediate change to established routines due to COVID-19. At this point, we are all still trying to practice the lessons we learned living with the virus.

As families begin to normalize daily routines, here are some tips on how your family can address challenges and the tools you may need to adapt to the new normal in our schools.

Plan ahead

“Planning helps me ensure that my children have all that they need—books, school supplies, uniforms and even snacks,” said Maricar Manicdao Guintu, a mother to one college student and two high school teens.

The Gualo Rai mom said that planning for school opening has also helped her family save money since they are able to reuse and recycle barely used school supplies.

These days, Guntu said, a big part of her family's back-to-school planning includes learning about the school's safety protocols. “My main worry is that they will catch COVID in school and I believe that the best way to combat this is to teach my children to be proactive in practicing the 3W's—washing hands, wearing a mask, and the six-foot physical distancing rule.”

Establish a mental health wellness routine

Medical experts consider COVID-19 as a collective trauma and studies continue to remain inconclusive on the pandemic's long-term impact. What is sure, however, is that cases of anxiety and depression have been soaring among young children and teens. The pandemic has disrupted all established aspects of our lives such as our sense of guidance, of coping, and, to some extent, access to food and basic necessities.

Dr. Nina Chaudhary, child and adolescent psychiatrist at the Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School, said it is important that parents be proactive in checking their children's mental health. “Look for signs of isolation, irritability, low mood, difficulty sleeping, lack of motivation and interest in everyday activities.”

Dr. Chaudhary recommends getting professional psychiatric or medical help once parents see these character changes so they can know for sure the reason behind the attitude and mood changes and they can be addressed immediately.

Establish school routines

What once were the norm of waking up at a designated time in the morning to prepare for school or wearing school uniforms were eased during remote learning. But since in-person school is back, this means new morning and sleeping schedules need to be reinforced and followed.

“It's three weeks before school opens and I already have my two teenagers sleeping early so they can wake up early to prepare for school. It's hard because sleeping late became customary, but now I have to be strict with the adjusted sleeping and wake up times to make sure they get the sleep they need,” Guintu said.

“My children have also gone back to their habit of organizing and preparing for school the night before, so this will make it easy for them to grab all that they need for school the next day,” she added.

Manage expectations. Things take time to change

Since we are still going through some big changes brought by COVID-19, it is expected that we still need more time to go back to what we were once accustomed to, including in-person learning.

Psychiatrists advise not to expect our children to come home with the outstanding grades they used to earn. There will be challenges with the way our children interact with their peers and their teachers because every now and then, they will have to go back to isolation, especially when there is an outbreak in their schools. Set and maintain realistic expectations for your children and anticipate that it will take time for everyone to get to normal routines.

Stay connected with friends

Children, especially the younger ones, are always the most excited to welcome a new school year. But because their interaction with friends and peers were limited due to COVID-19, we still continue to help them improve their social skills. Nemours' KidHealth recommends that helping children practice by setting up play dates or playing games as a family helps ease their anxiety. As an add-on motivator, praise their good behavior such as showing kindness, sharing, or being a good sport

Classroom rules

While children have already adjusted to being inside a classroom setting again, the younger ones are still trying to cope with new classroom

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PSS school bus drivers: The kings of CNMI roads

By **TERI M. FLORES**
CORRESPONDENT

Saipan Tribune spent one morning with some Public School System bus drivers to get a first-hand look into the lives of these men and woman who transport our children to and from school, twice a day, five times a week.

We were privileged to meet and know this group of individuals who are passionate and dedicated to their jobs, each one embodying the qualities of what a PSS bus driver is.

So who is the PSS bus

driver? He is one who commands respect, a multi-tasker with a heart full of compassion, patience, and loads of understanding to be able to work with students of different ages and upbringing.

Despite the long hours and the exacting demands of the job, the PSS bus driver is also a motivator, cheerleader and, at times, advocates of our school children. And each of them takes their job seriously because nothing is more important for them but the safety of our children on the road while they are on their way to and from school.

Who is a PSS bus driver? He is one who commands respect, a multi-tasker with a heart full of compassion, patience, and loads of understanding to be able to work with students of different ages and upbringing.

A dream job come to fruition



ROMAN M. REYES
Regular Bus Driver

Being a bus driver is a dream come true for Roman M. Reyes, who is known to his students as either Mr. Roman or Mr. Reyes. "When I was in school, I regularly rode the bus for about six years. I was very nosy, always asking our bus driver a lot of questions about the bus and how it works. Ever since I was a kid, I have always dreamt of being in this environment, taking care of students."

The 27-year-old Reyes is in charge of about 60 students attending Kagman Elementary School, ChaCha Oceanview Middle School, and Kagman High School. Despite being a bus driver for just 10 months, Reyes said the challenges of working with students of varying ages has so far been

Continued on Page 26

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so rewarding that he does not want to consider transferring to any job any time within the near future.

"My goal is to make sure that my students are safe from the time they get on the bus until the time I drop them home. We treat our students as if they are fragile packages that need a lot of care," he said.

It may not be an official part of their responsibilities, but being a bus driver also means being a mood gauger. "Every day with my students is a different day. Their moods when they get on the bus is a key indicator of how their day will turn out," said Reyes.

He said dealing with children aged between seven to 18 years old may pose a huge challenge, but he says open communication and mutual respect is the key to a harmonious relationship between a bus driver and his students.

"I treat them as if they are my own children. Talking to them allows me to understand them more. I just try to get along with them as much as I can to see where they are coming from. All students are different, they all come from different households so it's important that I get to know them so I know when to help and how to help when

they need help," he said.

Reyes said his interaction with his students have helped him relate to his own nephews and nieces. "I learn a lot from my bus riders and whatever lessons I learn, I try to apply them in real life situations."

Reyes considers the appreciation his students and their parents have shown him as the biggest rewards of his job. "My students have given me many gifts during appreciation day to show me

how much they value me. I was really surprised, thankful, blessed and so proud of what I do," he added.

With school opening just a few weeks away, Reyes has this friendly reminder to his students and parents: "Please be at the bus stop 5 minutes earlier than the pick-up time. Parents should not worry because I will take care of their children. I will keep them safe when I pick them up and drop them home."




The safety of students is our topmost priority



JONATHAN S. KAPILEO Regular Bus Driver

For the past four years now, Jonathan S. Kapileo has been the bus driver of students from the San Vicente and Dandan Elementary Schools and Marianas High School. He

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traded his tourist bus driver uniform to be a school bus driver because he finds it more engaging and rewarding to be involved in the process of helping students learn.

“It’s a good feeling dealing with kids, you learn a lot. Dealing with kids requires being sensitive to their attitude and behavior. You have to get your priorities straight first and be open to learning their attitude and behavior because everything all comes down to the kids,” he said.

Kapileo said being a school bus driver is not an easy task since one must be an efficient multi-tasker to succeed. On top of their main duty of driving the bus and keeping the students orderly during their travel to school, school bus drivers now also have to implement the 3W’s of COVID-19 protocol—masking up, hand sanitizing, and physical distancing—before they can close the bus doors and drive to their next destination.

“As a bus driver you need to stay focused because the safety of our students is in your hands. You cannot be distracted with your own worries. When the students are on the bus, your priority is your student’s safety,” he said.

This father of four says that in order to be an effective and efficient school bus driver, one has to have patience, understanding and greater awareness of one’s surroundings because you are the only one on the bus that is present and capable of keeping students safe.

Kapileo says he enjoys his job mainly because he deals with kids of different ages ranging from seven to 18 years old, from kindergarteners to senior high school students.

“I enjoy this job because we deal with different kids. Every child is different. Every kid grows up in a different environment. We can’t control that, but when they get on our bus we need to be able to control them and work with them, not just for our own safety but the safety of others as well. We drive, we teach, we help our students along the way so that when they get to school, they are ready to learn.”

Kapileo has this kind reminder to local motorists: “Please pay attention on the road and do not ignore our stop arm because a driver’s recklessness makes it more dangerous for everyone on the road, most especially, our children.”

The Joys of Working With SPED Students



RITA RAMANGMOU AGULTO

Bus Driver for SPED Bus

NORBERT LOPEZ AMBALAN

Bus Conductor for SPED Bus

At 32 years as a PSS employee, Rita R. Agulto is the longest serving employee in the group. She started in the school system in 1998 in the Food Service Department and then moved to the Office of Pupil Transportation to become a school bus conductor until finally becoming a

school bus driver for students with special needs.

A mother to six children but now an empty nester, Agulto said she will not trade her job for any other, even within the Public School System. “I like working with special needs students. I learn a lot from them, especially communicating through sign language. I enjoy driving the bus for them and making them feel comfortable on their way to school.”

Similar to the other bus drivers, Agulto said the job challenges can be big at times, most especially since she handles special needs students. “Sometimes, some of the students do not want to follow instructions and they just want to sit anywhere. But we try and work with them. We try to make them understand even if it’s hard for them to do that,” said Agulto.

Bus conductor Norbert L. Ambalan shares Agulto’s sentiments, but he says in the end and after much coaxing, students will “eventually listen and follow.”

Agulto said she works with the students’ teachers in thrashing out issues. For the most part, Agulto and Ambalan agree that while their students may not be as communicative as other students, their students are more dis-

ciplined and respectful.

“I like making our students feel good. I treat them like they are my own kids. ...I do not like it when other people look down on them,” said Agulto.

A former cook at a local restaurant, Ambalan is the newest addition to the team, having been in the system for just nine months. He applied for a job in the bus fleet, but he did not expect to be assigned to special education.

“I have no regrets. I like my job and I like working with our students, I will not trade this job for something else,” said Ambalan.

This father to a 2-year-old son and another child on the way, Ambalan said he applies the lessons he has learned interacting with special needs students to his son, especially when it comes to discipline.

Ambalan urges motorists to be cautious while driving, especially when they see the SPED bus. To parents, Ambalan asks for their patience during mornings when their children are not in the mood to ride the bus and go to school. “Please listen to them,” he said.

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The Disciplinarian



JOHN OLOPAI TAITANO
Regular Bus Driver

John O. Taitano believes he carries the reputation of being the “most hated” PSS school bus driver because he runs his bus like a tight ship. Under his watchful eye, his students either follow his rules or they have the choice not to take his bus.

But, despite what his students think he is, Taitano is, in fact, a very congenial man with an easy smile and welcoming demeanor. He just happens to be a strict disciplinarian who wants order among his students. He says his reputation gives him the motivation to wake up in the mornings, eager to do his job.

“Be a thermostat, not a thermometer” is Kapileo’s guiding principle. He believes that a school bus driver should be able to gauge the mood of his students so he can provide them the support they need to be ready for the school day. “Every student comes from a different background and circumstances. As the school bus driver and being one of the first people they will interact with during the day, it’s important that we set them up for success by lifting their spirits, cheering them up, and paying them extra attention when they need it. A cheerful morning greeting and a welcome smile always works wonders,” said Kapileo.

This 12-year veteran of the fleet acknowledges that, while the job may be hard it is very rewarding. Earning a good, livable salary is just one of three big takeaways of the

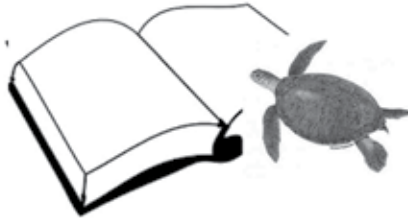
job. Second is the opportunity to get a deeper understanding and appreciation of human nature based on their daily interaction with their students. For Kapileo, most important of all is the good working relationship the bus drivers have with each other on top of a work environment that encourages unity and camaraderie. “I love these guys. You can never find a better group of people than my co-workers. They are what keeps me in my job. They are just awesome.” He is also very proud of the bond he has with his stu-

dents. “I’m proud of the trust my students have on me. Being from the south where my students are also from, they ask my help to mediate and solve problems they have in school.

Kapileo has this message for students and parents this coming school opening: “I hope that they [students] do not forget to bring their masks and observe the safety protocols. To the parents, help us help them make it easier and safe for their children to attend school.”

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DIVISION OF YOUTH SERVICES

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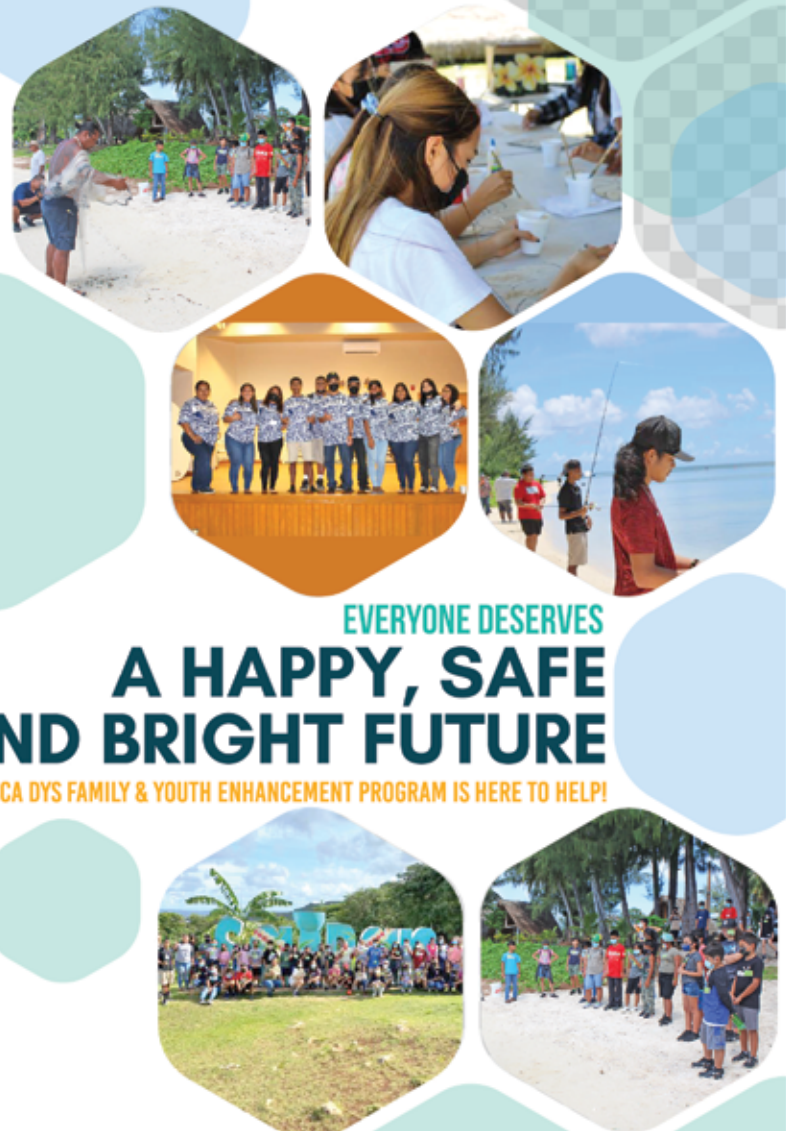
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Creating ideal learning space in a classroom

By TERI FLORES
CORRESPONDENT

While parents and students are busy shopping and preparing for school opening, we find our teachers and instructors also caught in the same shopping frenzy. Their shopping list, however, looks more extensive than the regular supply of pencils, paper, and crayons. On their list you will find hammers, paint, construction tapes and all other materials meant to create a conducive hub of learning for this year's scholars.

While the classroom's overall aesthetics of design and color excite the senses and inspire creativity, there is still the question of whether teachers are missing opportunities to create a classroom that maximizes teaching and learning.

So what is the ideal classroom setup? Admiral Herbert G. Hopwood Middle School teacher Victoria Nishida considers a conducive learning environment important for student's success as it promotes academic achievements and social and emotional well-being. She believes that, in a positive learning environment, students develop sense or moral and civic traits of competence, citizenry, and responsibility. The long-term effect is that our students become productive, knowledgeable,

and proactive members of our society.

Nishida, who has been teaching math, social studies, and science for 11 years now, said, "Gone are the days of the traditional classroom setup, where students' desks were in rows while the teacher positioned herself in front and center of the room."

Compared to previous years, teachers now have taken more of the role of facilitator of learning. The classroom layout has changed to reflect the teacher's changing role, said Nishida.

The Chalk Blog provides the following suggestions to creating an ideal classroom

- Make the room a "learning studio" by populating the room with movable furniture and walls that can be reconfigured for different learning situations that will allow for collaborative, individual or group learning.

- Keep materials ready and abundant—including books so that a student can engage in casual reading if they have a spare moment.

- Create a place where students can meet and feel secure—students learn from each other, they need a consistent environment where they can have face-to-face interactions. Provide comfortable seating and lighting for students who need an alternative to the typical classroom chairs and desks.

CHILD

From Page 24

rules and setup. Educational experts recommend that, for those in this age group, parents could help their children by reminding them that the rules are there to keep everyone safe

Keeping up with schoolwork

By now, many students have already adjusted well to remote learning. However, studies show that children with learning issues, those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorders or ADHD, and some who have little or no access to technology have struggled to cope.

Guintu said that, as parents of student achievers, the best thing she did was to lift the pressure on her children who were worrying about coping with a new workload and getting grades that were lower than expected. "It also helped that teachers were there to help my children catch up with schoolwork if they felt they were lagging behind."

Stay flexible and adaptable

As a family, Guintu said they had to learn to adapt and anticipate changes to workload and schedules at a short notice to ensure that the children's studies were not disrupted.

"As parents, we have learned that the best way to support our children is to stay mentally flexible. We worked with teachers to stay on top of school schedules and we made sure that we can go to them at any time to talk about our children's progress in case they would need extra help with schoolwork."

Be present and consistent

Children need stability during times of changes. Dr. Chaudhary said the best help parents can give is to be present, predictable, and consistent.

"Giving time and emotional support and understanding their daily challenges is what we tried to always give our children. It's compassion, warmth, and calm that made them overcome the setbacks," Guintu said.

WELCOME BACK STUDENTS

Our job is not to prepare students for something. Our job is to help students prepare themselves for anything.
- AJ Juliani



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 - Tinian: (670) 433-9233
 - Rota: (670) 532-9461
- Or fill out an assessment form online at www.staysafecnmi.com/self-reporting

If you are experiencing severe symptoms of COVID-19, call 911. Severe symptoms include: trouble breathing; persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion; inability to wake or stay awake; pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone.



www.staysafecnmi.com/livecovidsafe

