

Pohnpei's new "government" website—a work in progress

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"Welcome to the Official Website of Pohnpei State Government," the home page of the website at www.pohnpeimet.fm says. The website was published to the international web community on July 5, 2010, according to Pohnpei State Public Affairs Officer Heinrick Stevenson.

At the top of the screen, the words, "Peace, Unity, Transparency" and "Accountability" float by one at a time from left to right before they fade away, superimposed over the word, "Kaselehlie," the beautiful and meaning filled greeting so often taken for granted by many of us who use it.

Though the website has been published for the world to see, it's obvious that it is a work still in progress. The home page of the new website, along with several others pages doesn't quite fit horizontally on a computer screen. The drop-down headings don't fit in their spaces. Neither do the menus below the headings. Additionally, the website isn't, in the fullest interpretation of what the word "government" means in FSM, the official website of the "Pohnpei State Government" since only the Executive Branch is represented.

"The website is designed primarily to inform and to share with the people of Pohnpei and the general public true and realistic information concerning what the government (executive branch) is doing, and at the same time to seek public input and guidance on how best we can improve delivery of public services to those that we serve," says the message written by Pohnpei State's Governor John Ehsa which dominates the home page.

Under the heading of "Latest News" on the home page are the words, "Welcome Governor Ehsa from your trip from South Korea," followed by the words writ in blue, "Contact us" and "Contact," as Governor Ehsa said in his message, is the purpose for the site it is also a missing component.

While every page has an alluring blue lettered, "Contact Us," clickable link, the link doesn't work. I clicked the blue letters, filled in the requested information boxes including my name and email address and wrote a fairly long comment in the box provided for that purpose and clicked submit. The next page that came up said, "The contact form you are testing needs to be setup." Apparently, the Allwebco template hasn't actually been finished by the designer of the website so no contact can yet be made by the website without sending an email by other means.

I clicked the link that said info@pohnpeimet.fm under the heading "email us" and the email address that popped up in my Outlook Express page showed the address isou@pohnpeimet.fm. Two days after writing to that email address there still has not been a response, which, I suppose is not too surprising given that there currently is little to no Internet access in the new Pohnpei State Government Complex.

Indeed, the spreadsheet formatted page that represents the Executive Directory lists the names of some of the people working at the top levels of government but contained absolutely no information as to how to contact them. Though the spread sheet implies that there should be, there are no recorded fax numbers, no home, cell or office phone numbers and, not a single email address.

News is currently scant on the new website. At press time one could find out which four bills were signed by Governor Ehsa last month but you can't read the bills.

Some websites carry disclaimers and the new Pohnpei State website is no exception, "Any person who intends to use the information is hereby advised to confirm its accuracy with Pohnpei State Office of the Governor or the party to which the information is related, before acting on that information."

I suppose that this means that whoever the webmaster is has carte blanche to post whatever he or she wants to post without having to worry too terribly much as to whether it's accurate. It's probably not what they meant but that was my immediate knee jerk interpretation.

Under the heading "Pohnpei Met" are the following words: "Our objective is to provide a better life for our people, to live in a healthy environment and to live a long prosperous lives in Pohnpei."

There is a box devoted to "What's New in Pohnpei," that takes up a good portion of the left side of the computer screen. The box below it says, "Click on the resources links in this website to find out more about opportunities, programs, projects and much more here in Pohnpei State." Why not leave those boxes out and save the screen space?

Having said all of these things, the Governor's office is to be congratulated for making the effort to have a new website. It seems like a natural thing to do since so many Pohnpeians rely on the Internet to get news about goings on their homeland. With the arrival of high speed communications in the FSM more and more Pohnpeians who still live here are connecting to the Internet for information.

I applaud the Governor's office for making this effort and look forward to great improvements in the site in days to come. The website is miles better than the non-existent one that was available a few days ago.

It's been a long time since the Pohnpei Governor's Office has had a website. Former Governor Johnny David had one that can still be found online at www.fm/PohnpeiGov. The date of the last press release on that site was 2006.

The Pohnpei Legislature has a website (www.fm/PohnpeiLeg) as well but until today I had no idea that its use had been diverted for use by the now adjourned Second Pohnpei Constitutional Convention that began in 2009. Before that time the last update of the Pohnpei Legislature website had been in 2005 as far as I could see.

The Kosrae Legislature has a website (<http://www.kosraelegislature.org/>) but I didn't see any updates on that site more recent than 2008. I did see a notice on the site saying that due to staff shortages the Kosrae legislature was behind in its updates of bills and other information. "We expect to have everything back to normal shortly," the webpage says. Apparently that function is the responsibility of John McKenzie, who as the Attorney for Kosrae's Legislature must be up to his neck in paperwork and has very little if any support staff.

I couldn't find a website for the Kosrae Governor's office. I also could find no governmental websites for Chuuk State.

By far, the most up to date and best produced State website I found for the FSM was the Yap State Government page (www.yapstategov.org.) It takes a while to load up on a dial up line but the information in it is practically up to the minute.

Every link in it works. I was able to sign up for a daily news update from Yap State Government. Immediately after signing up I checked my email and there was a welcome message for the service for which I'd just signed up. Larry Raigetel, who is in charge of Yap's Department of Youth and Civic Affairs said that the website was started two years ago, using Compact Capacity Building Sector Grant money for the startup. Garrett Johnson serves as the webmaster for the site.

Though the Yap webpage has a disclaimer similar to the one on Pohnpei's website I was able to find out how to apply for a foreign investment permit something that isn't on the Pohnpei State website. The only mention of Foreign Investment on Pohnpei's site is an incomplete sentence.

It would be petty to overly criticize a startup website because of typos or grammatical errors so I won't do it. I did, however, find the description of Pohnpei's economy to be quite informative even if I didn't really quite understand what was being said despite having lived here for nearly 10 years. "Pohnpei has a typical mixed economy consisting mostly of government, households and businesses. The economy can best be described as a blend of subsistence and economic dependency."

Perhaps in time, the Pohnpei Governor's site will be just as good as Yap's. They might have waited to release the site until it was fully functional but they didn't choose to do so. But then, there is a website and that's a very good start.