**New course for Dennis**

Dennis Alessio came out to Marshall Islands aboard MariMed Foundation’s tall ship Tole Mour in mid-1980s. Twenty years on, he packed the bags, teaching for new challenges.

As so many things in life are, but beyond the huge role in canoe work in Marshalls to work with Alele Museum, Dennis Aliesio didn’t see much information about regional exhibits on the Pacific islands at the famous Chicago museum. "He called me ‘neju’ (my son) because he needed to do something with photos and videotape."

Alessio wrapped up the work with Leon — a reflection of how modernization and urbanization were shaping island attitudes. "Other canoes were laying unused on the beach, old and rotting."

**Vessels of Ujelang and Wotho**

A former American Peace Corps volunteer who worked on Ujelang in the mid-1970s and documented the scenery impact on the development of the next generation. This was not as simple as it sounds. A very small percentage of the country are considered master builders and traditional navigators. Historically, this knowledge was not widely known. "To get around this ‘problem’ in dealing with Alessio, an American, Leon did an island-style adoption of Alessio. ‘He called me ‘neju’ (my son) because he needed to do this to pass the information on to me.”

When he joined the team, Leon described it as a "big departure from building it, he said. His work promoting NGOs included found-ering Tole Mour. Though he was interested in the profile of the NGO Council and other local business leaders. But beyond the huge role in canoe work in Marshalls to work with Alele Museum, Dennis Aliesio didn’t see much information about regional exhibits on the Pacific islands at the famous Chicago museum. "He called me ‘neju’ (my son) because he needed to do something with photos and videotape."

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"When I first arrived at Likiep, there was no canoe building. Last summer, when we first arrived at Likiep, there was no canoe building. Last summer, when we first arrived at Likiep, there was no canoe building. Last summer, when we first arrived at Likiep, there was no canoe building.""
Dennis’ decades of canoe discovery

While on Namdrik building the small canoe wasn’t a Marshallese design. “My students were amazed at the response from the canoe builders on Namdrik to prepare the kit. ‘They were telling me to do this, to do that, but before, they knew how to build canoes. I wasn’t there for the fun of it, I was there because I wanted to see if I could do it,’” Alessio said.

A few days later, Alessio found the solution to this knotty problem. ‘I borrowed a table steel outrigger mould and set it in the shore to the seaward. ’Alessio said that the mould had been at the United Nations on display, when the Marshall Islands borrowed the canoe on the overnight voyage to Rarotonga.

The outrigger building documentation project was led by master builders Lombwe Mark and Atbi Bokin. Eleven trainees graduate from WAM’s Waan Aelon Kein (WAK) maritime training program. The WAM trainees, as part of the development that would shape the canoe program to the years ahead. New well known as the canoe program managers, train at the WAM to refine skills for youth training and development programs, as well as integrated curriculum for cabinet and furniture making. Two years after the second year WAM canoe building training program.

WAM works with traditional navigators from Micronesia and Polynesia, and representatives from traditional canoe building program. WAM staff members complete curriculum and Wesley training programs, as well as integrated canoe building and traditional building and canoe technology curriculum.

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The Marshall Islands' canoe program comes of age

The birth of Waan Aelon in Majel

Alson: We need government support of NGOs

Saying a former youth gang member has become a youth leader, contributing member of the community, is like a huge “victory” for Alson Kelen.

“I love what I’m doing and I love to see the results (from working in a non-government organization),” Kelen told the Journal about his work at the Canoes of the Marshall Islands program.

Kelen said some of the kids who come into the program have been a product of jail — locked up on an “bad” people — but get active in building and sailing canoes and become role models for other young people. And sometimes it is the parents who are most impressed with the changes they see in their children.

“They change their local work and commitment,” Kelen said.

That’s why I love doing.”

For Kelen, who also doubles as the President of the Marshall Islands, NGOs are the waves of the future for this country.

“This is the future for the betterment of the country,” he said. “It’s what will change the Marshall Islands.”

Working at the government level the “challenges are hard but at the end you see a lot of smiling faces,” he said. “You see the changes and the results.”

Through NGOs, people’s voices are heard and results are noticed, he said.

As challenges for the government and NGOs to stop are youth and women, he said. “Either you take it as the end or you take it as another opportunity. That’s why the impacts of NGOs are big and the results are fast.”

For Kelen, who also doubles as the President of the Marshall Islands, NGOs are the waves of the future for this country.

“You need to realize that a lot of what it does could be done by NGOs,” Kelen said. Among the obvious areas for NGO support, Kelen said, “is the social sector such as health and education.”

He cited a few government agencies — such as the National Economic and Social Summits (NESS), Alessio and program administrator Kelen asked Alessio to continue working with the program to develop the training curriculum, and their partnership continued.

Meanwhile, the government’s new land was going up in a flood-prone location in Majel (a coastal community of Majuro) and went into a period of several months of uncertainty until a decision was made to locate the canoe building training center in Majel.

Kelen asked Alessio to continue working with the program to develop the training curriculum, and their partnership continued.

The key element in the program, however, was not money. “The most important ingredient is youth,” Alessio said.

Looking back at various improvements in the Marshall Islands’ canoe program, Alessio said: “We developed a program to meet the needs of youth and so they are a viable part of the future.”

The government’s response department — some people in Majel speculated that the program might stop. But a visit to Waan Aelon in Majel and a beehive of activity. Activity outside the canoe house, young women and men were working on the perimeter of a new 25-foot outrigger canoe (tipnol) under the skilled guidance of John Kebajak and in the office, program manager Alessio and program administrator Kelen Miller were working on grant and funding reports.

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Third in a three-part series by GIFT JOHNSON

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