

## Indentured in America

By Walter F. Roche Jr., Sun Staff; and Willoughby Mariano, Orlando Sentinel

Trapped in servitude far from their homes Lured by promises, Pacific Islanders come in search of education and employment, but instead find poverty, misery and threats.

After journeying across an ocean and a continent - from the tiny Pacific isle of Chuuk to rural Ashburn, Ga. - Gloria Likiche was surprised to find herself working the graveyard shift at a nursing home, emptying bedpans for \$5.50 an hour and eating so poorly that she felt she was starving.

This was neither the nurse-training program nor the well-paid job that recruiters had talked so glowingly about when they lured her to America from her impoverished island.

"Recruiters told me, 'You are going to become a nurse,'" she said. "I thought I would like to do that."

Accustomed to a casual lifestyle of cutting breadfruit from trees and wading into the surf to gather shrimp, Likiche found herself living in a dilapidated, unheated trailer, where she and co-workers subsisted on a meager diet, "boiling rice and vinegar and salt," her stomach burning from hunger. Within months, she'd lost 30 pounds, and her mother on the Micronesian island of Chuuk was sending care packages of cookies and crackers.

Likiche was 18 when she signed English-language legal contracts she didn't fully understand that indentured her to work for two years - not as a nurse, as she expected, but as a certified nursing assistant, the lowest rung on the health care ladder.

She earned only about \$100 a week after deductions, she said, and if she had walked out before her contract expired, she would have been obligated to pay damages equivalent to months of wages. She felt she had been deceived, but knew that her chances of escape were slim.

"We're caught," she told her mother over the phone. They both broke down in tears.

A yearlong investigation by The Sun and the Orlando Sentinel has found that more than 2,000 Micronesians and Marshall islanders have been brought to the United States on one-way tickets and consigned to years of virtual servitude by a handful of small-time entrepreneurs who exploit a little-known 16-year-old Compact of Free Association that allows the island residents to settle and work here without visas.

These "body brokers," as they are known in the trade, collect fees of up to \$5,500 from employers such as nursing homes and Florida amusement parks for delivering each worker who signs a one- or two-year contract to do menial, low-paying jobs that Americans seldom will.

Brokers or employers sometimes deduct fees for housing, transportation and unexplained service charges from workers' pay.

A recent U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service memorandum states that such contracts may violate a federal law banning "human trafficking," the term used by governments to describe modern-day slavery, a practice condemned by the United States and the United Nations.

The document cites clauses of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 that prohibit workers from being held in "debt bondage" and "involuntary servitude" through "abuse or threatened abuse of the legal process," crimes punishable by up to 20 years in prison and fines of \$5,000 to \$250,000 for each offense.

But efforts to reform the recruiting process as part of negotiations to extend the compact have been ignored by the chief U.S. negotiator, who is eager to continue leasing a missile test range in the Marshall Islands. Island officials say they won't be "bullied" into impeding the flow of residents to the United States.

For islanders who leave, getting home can be difficult. When their contracts expire, many find themselves stranded in America without money to fly home, even though some contracts guarantee a return ticket. Brokers such as Donald Finn of Bonita Springs, Fla., who pioneered the business in the late 1990s and imported Likiche, have avoided this obligation - a typical fare is \$1,500 - by dissolving their companies or declaring bankruptcy.

"You've got these people indentured - they can't leave," said Vernon Briggs Jr., a professor of labor economics at Cornell University in New York. "It's not surprising that employers will do it if the government allows it. ... The question is whether government should be encouraging this sort of thing. It doesn't really improve the lives of the people who take the jobs."

Some of the workers are doubly indentured. First, they promise to pay the broker up to \$2,500 in damages if they quit before they fulfill the contract. A second, similar contract signed with their employer can obligate them to pay a penalty to the nursing home. Finn recruited for an Iowa facility that made workers sign contracts requiring them to pay damages of \$3,750 if they left prematurely.

Workers can thus be liable for up to \$6,250, a crippling sum for those who earn so little. In addition to damages, at least two workers who quit even had to pay a broker's legal fees as part of a settlement.

And some of this commerce is subsidized by U.S. taxpayers. Under the U.S. Workforce Investment Act, formerly known as the Job Training Partnership Act, two brokers have received grants of \$252 per worker to screen and train them for jobs in America.

### **Import-export**

The brokers are a disparate group. Besides Finn, a longtime nursing home manager, they include a one-time radio station manager, a nurse and David Bencivenga, owner of North Pacific Trading Co. of Kissimmee, Fla.

Bencivenga, a former actuarial consultant to the Marshall Islands, became a recruiter after failing to persuade SeaWorld officials to buy wooden handicrafts he'd imported from the islands.

He says the workers he has imported and sent to work in Central Florida at SeaWorld, Busch Gardens, Universal Studios and McDonald's know what to expect. The contracts are "very specific," he said in his makeshift office in the Orlando apartment complex where he houses his workers. "Everything is spelled out."

Typically, brokers work in partnership with influential island figures. Bencivenga's partner, Hubert Yamada, is a former director of the Social Security Administration on Pohnpei, one of the Federated States of Micronesia, and owns a construction company and other businesses.

Among the factors that led SeaWorld to give North Pacific a contract were Yamada's position in the government and a letter of introduction that Bencivenga provided from the governor of Pohnpei, park officials said.

"We enthusiastically support this endeavor," wrote Gov. Del S. Pangelinan in June 1998. "We will work jointly with North Pacific Trading Company, College of Micronesia-FSM and SeaWorld of Florida to design, implement and maintain a successful program." (Involvement by the college never materialized.)

"We felt this was a reputable person," said the president of SeaWorld, Victor G. Abbey. "It was a mistake, to be very direct about it."

SeaWorld no longer does business with Bencivenga, and the recruits he sent there are no longer part of his program.

### **'A perfect worker'**

The unique status that allows the Pacific islanders to work in the United States is a legacy of the days after World War II when Micronesia and the Marshall Islands - situated west of Hawaii and spread over thousands of square miles - were U.S. trust territories.

A Compact of Free Association that went into effect in 1986 has provided about \$2 billion in U.S. aid to prop up the islands' flagging economies and enabled their governments to participate in federal programs.

While the compact is intended to put islanders on equal footing in seeking employment in the United States, Americans working in comparable jobs are not asked to sign such contracts or promissory notes. But the Pacific islanders - many of them teen-agers, some without high school degrees - are ripe for exploitation because they rarely understand the obligation they are taking on. Though English is spoken in the islands, most recruits are fluent only in one of several Micronesian languages.

And as noncitizens, they are not eligible for help from a government-supported Legal Services attorney to contest the contracts. Some dissatisfied recruits flee their jobs anyway, but many more are cowed. Likiche cited the threat of legal reprisals, which are spelled out in the contracts, as a reason for staying. Like many, she said she was never given copies of documents she signed.

"It's a perfect worker, isn't it?" said Andrew Sprenger, a lawyer in Micronesia who helped recruits who were sued. "They're legally there, and yet they can be taken advantage of."

While workers are on the job, recruiters and employers often deduct money from their paychecks to recoup training costs and housing advances.

In Florida, Bencivenga arranged for employers to remit payments of \$85 to \$95 a week directly to him for worker housing, transportation and other services, plus a monthly "administrative fee" of \$25.

Abbey said SeaWorld deducted only for services approved by the workers when they were hired, but recruits said they merely followed Bencivenga's instructions in filling out forms.

In a crowded apartment in Tampa last December, a worker at SeaWorld displayed a check stub typical of those of the Micronesian recruits, showing that his take-home pay for a job paying \$6.70 an hour was \$251.47 for the last two weeks of 2001.

A total of \$170 - \$85 per week, or more than 30 percent of his earnings - had been deducted by Bencivenga's company. The worker asked that his name not be used for fear of retribution.

Bencivenga and other recruiters insist that any problems with the program are the fault of the recruits, who he says often drink too much and fail to live up to their part of the agreement.

Micronesians, Bencivenga said, have "an American Indian-type drinking problem" that causes them to act disruptively and show up late for work or not at all.

### **'The escape hatch'**

The Federated States of Micronesia - Chuuk, Pohnpei, Yap, Kosrae and 603 smaller islands - and the Republic of the Marshall Islands are not picture postcard tropical paradises of waving palm trees, endless white beaches and cerulean seas.

The islands of Micronesia, formerly known as the Carolines, were the scene of ferocious battles with Japanese forces during World War II. Beneath the waters of Chuuk (formerly Truk) Lagoon lies the wreckage of more than 100 Japanese planes and ships, sent to the bottom during an American attack in 1944. The Marshalls are perhaps best known as the site of U.S. weapons testing at Bikini and Enewetak atolls from 1946 to 1958 - 67 nuclear devices have been detonated there - and as the location of the Ronald Reagan Missile Range on Kwajalein.

Tourists who flock to Tahiti and Bora Bora bypass these remote, gritty and poverty-scarred dots of land, where the few jobs tend to pay only \$1.35 an hour and most residents live in self-built homes made of plywood and corrugated metal.

Fishing and government have long been the traditional employers, but the fishing industry has collapsed and government jobs have been slashed because of cuts in U.S. aid. The islands' unemployment rate approaches 30 percent, the birth rate is high and many residents leave in search of greater opportunity.

More than 14,000 islanders - nearly one-tenth of the population - have moved since 1986 to Hawaii and the U.S. territories of Guam and the Northern Marianas, where they work at menial jobs and occupy the lowest social rung, according to surveys published last year by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

"The escape hatch is access to the United States for work," said the Rev. Francis X. Hezel, a Jesuit priest who has been studying the Micronesian economy for decades. "People were saying, 'When's the next plane leaving? I'm out of here.' It's bye-bye time at the airport."

So, it was no surprise that when recruiters arrived in the islands five years ago that their pitch was greeted warmly, especially when it was being made by respected teachers, government officials and other members of the islands' elite.

A former recruiter in Pohnpei, Yalmer Helgenberger, owns a hotel and directs the island's office of economic affairs. Another Pohnpei recruiter, Glenn B. Jano, works in the government's marine fisheries agency. Yet another, Johnny Hebel, works for the government-owned hospital.

In the Marshall Islands, Larry Muller oversees a merchant marine training program for the government when he is not recruiting for an American firm, DeMichele Et Al. Inc. of Naples, Fla. When his partner, Dennis DeMichele, visited the capital, Majuro, 18 months ago, Muller was able to set up a meeting with the country's president, Kessai Hesa Note, to discuss their worker recruiting program.

The islanders learn of the programs through word of mouth, signs posted at stores, short-wave radio, classroom announcements, and informational sessions conducted by recruiters at libraries and other meeting places. In one instance, human resources officials from SeaWorld traveled to Pohnpei to show islanders recruitment videos and interview prospective workers.

The stories told by islanders lured to America are remarkably similar - set against the looming threat of legal action if they protest or try to flee.

### **'Starving' in America**

Gloria Likiche (pronounced "le quiche") was attending a health worker training program in Micronesia four years ago when a teacher told the class of an opportunity to go to the United States and be trained as a nurse.

She soon signed up with Guardian Solutions, a Finn company operating out of Bonita Springs, Fla.

"It will be good," she thought, better than life on Weno, the main isle in Chuuk Lagoon, seven square miles steeped in poverty and choked with trash and rusting cars.

She expected to join an educational program that would lead to a registered nurse's diploma, she said. Instead, she and fellow recruits from Micronesia - Delma Pitio, Margareth Siales and Patsipa Gray - found themselves working as nursing assistants at Ashburn Health Care in rural Georgia, about 80 miles south of Macon, poorly paid and miles from the nearest grocery store.

"We were boiling rice and vinegar and salt," Likiche recalled. "It didn't taste very good, but we had to eat. We had no choice."

Linda Likiche, in an interview on her home island, said her daughter wrote that she was "starving to death."

Anthony Likiche, a technician for the local phone company, said he did not understand how his daughter and her friends could starve in the United States. "I sent them a case of biscuits - imagine that - when they asked us to send them because they're hungry."

For Gloria Likiche and the other recruits, the very idea of a nursing home was foreign. There are no nursing homes in the islands, nor even such a term in their native language. The elderly in the islands generally are cared for at home as part of extended families.

Likiche said she ran to the bathroom and vomited the first time she was assigned to empty bedpans. Pitoli said their backs hurt constantly from lifting patients from their beds and that she started smoking to take her mind off her work.

But as disappointed as they were with their jobs, their living conditions were worse. At first, the nursing home placed them in an apartment building a few miles away. They had never lived among strangers, said Gray, who was wary of the neighbors.

Whether asking for help at the grocery store, listening to criticism from bosses at work, or hearing catcalls from strange men in passing cars, she constantly sensed that Americans considered her inferior.

"It's like they're looking down at us, and I hate that. I don't like to be treated like that," said Gray. "I expected to be treated here as an equal, but I wasn't."

After about four months, nursing home officials told the four women they had to find another place to live, saying that they were causing a commotion and bothering other tenants, an accusation they deny. All they could afford was a two-bedroom trailer in the woods for \$400 a month.

It had no washing machine, so they scrubbed their clothes in the bathtub. There was no heat, so when the frost came, they slept on blankets on the kitchen floor near the gas stove. They were afraid to sleep alone in the remote locale.

Siales was so afraid to be alone that she went to work eight hours early and waited in the lounge until her shift began.

It was an hour's walk each way to the nearest grocery, Likiche said, so they often bought junk food at a gas station or ate at a nearby fast-food restaurant. Eventually, they scraped up the money for a cheap used car, but it was often in the shop for repairs.

"If I had known what it was going to be like, I wouldn't have done it," said Siales, who lost 50 pounds after arriving in the United States.

Each of the women said she continued to work at the nursing home because she felt her honor was at stake. They saw quitting their jobs as akin to dropping out of school. And, they said, a nursing home administrator told them they had to work off debts, though they did not know for what. Pitoli said recruiters told them that if they quit, they would face legal problems.

"They said we would go to court and jail," she said.

The four women quit their jobs in January 2000, after a nursing home administrator told them that they had repaid their debts. Likiche moved with Siales and Pitoli to Charlotte, N.C., to be near relatives and friends. Gray stayed with a fiance she met in Ashburn.

Michael Stewart, the administrator at Ashburn Health Care, said he wasn't there when the Micronesians worked at the nursing home. Stewart did not respond to written questions about the employment of the Micronesians or to subsequent phone calls.

Finn, the president of Guardian Solutions - the firm that recruited Likiche - said he could not explain why sums were withheld from her checks beyond the usual deductions for taxes and Social Security.

However, contracts signed with nursing homes by Finn's sister company, Medical Placement Services Inc., called for nursing homes to advance his recruits at least \$400 to settle them in housing. That money would then be repaid through payroll deductions.

Finn, who placed Guardian into bankruptcy this year after a dispute with workers, said he was not familiar with Likiche's case or the details of any deductions from her checks.

Rail-thin and chain-smoking, he spoke in a small conference room amid the din in his office, which was being partitioned off because he could no longer afford to rent the full space. When asked about Likiche, he disappeared for a time into a back room, saying that he was checking his files.

Likiche is now an aide at a nursing home in North Carolina. The pay is better - \$8 an hour - and the increase is magnified because less money is being deducted.

"I said, 'Wow! We see big money,'" Likiche said jokingly, recalling her first paycheck there.

But her income is still barely enough to make ends meet, and saving enough to pay her way home is barely imaginable. It will take at least five years, she estimates.

So, Likiche remains stranded in the United States, living with regret and painful memories.

"I'll always remember," she said. "I'll always remember because I suffered so much."

For two years, Likiche - like thousands of others - was the helpless, frightened pawn of those who traffic in human beings. Would she have made the 8,000-mile trip to the United States had she known what awaited her?

"No!" she declared.

### **A new Kentucky home**

Fubina Pillas, like Likiche, was imported by Finn after listening to a recruiting pitch by Johnny Hebel, his Micronesian partner.

Pillas, 27, eldest child in a poor family of farmers, fishermen and handicraft makers, grew up on the tiny island of Uman, a 30-minute boat ride from Weno. She left her three children behind, believing that she was headed to nursing school in the United States and would earn money to send home.

When she arrived in December 1998 with three other young Micronesians at Edgemont Manor, a nursing home in Cynthiana, Ky., administrators showed the women to their new home - a cramped efficiency apartment on the bottom floor.

Jammed into the room - designed to house a single occupant - were two bunk beds, a small stove, a table and two chairs. They had no car or telephone. They rarely received promised rides to run errands. And they were not nursing students, but nursing assistants working for about \$5.50 an hour.

Shifts lasted up to 12 hours, said Pillas and Micronesian co-worker Cecilia May. Pillas, a bit over 5 feet tall, strained to lift patients who needed washing, changing and feeding. Her back often hurt so much that she could not touch her toes.

On days off, the women hid in their room, ignoring knocks at the door from administrators ordering them to work.

"Even on your day off, you have to do what you're told," Pillas recalls a supervisor saying. "I told them that they treated me and my friends like slaves."

Pillas left the program about a year later, but did not have the money to return home. She is now unemployed in Lexington, Ky.

"I wish I'd stayed back home with my parents," said Pillas. "I miss them. It's been four years."

Edgemont Manor officials acknowledged housing three or four recruits in a small apartment meant for a single person, but said they were doing recruits a favor by charging no rent and letting them stay for months on end. When they were short-staffed, supervisors did go downstairs, knock on the door and ask them to work on days off.

But Jerry Jones, the nursing home's administrator at the time, said Micronesians refused because they did not like to work.

"They were like children," he said. "They expected to be taken care of and showed up with nothing. We had to advance them money so they could shop and buy food."

Jones said the nursing home employed 12 or 15 Micronesians, most of whom left soon after they arrived.

"We just thought we were getting a load of duds," he said.

Micronesian recruits could not get a telephone because they lacked credit, and nursing home officials refused to co-sign for one after receiving bills for thousands of dollars for workers' calls home on office phones. The recruits said they did not know they were running up such bills. Ultimately, the nursing home deducted the cost from their wages, recruits and officials said.

By no means could this be called slavery, Jones said, especially after officials gave them furniture and free housing. He said it wasn't his problem if recruits were led to believe they were going to nursing school.

"That's between them and the company that brought them," he said.

### **Painful deductions**

Albert Zarred, a former recruit from Pohnpei, displayed a pile of 30 check stubs he has saved in a yellow envelope, documenting roughly a year spent in a janitorial job at Universal Studios in Orlando.

According to a typical check stub from December 2000, Zarred worked 31 hours a week at \$6.40 an hour, but took home just \$86.93 after deductions. Ninety-five dollars went to Bencivenga's North Pacific Trading Co., which had promised to take care of Zarred's every need.



Zarred had little choice. He and other Micronesians would have faced a daunting task of finding lodging on their own and arranging transportation to work or the supermarket. They had no credit history, no driver's license, no car, no money.

Home became a cot in an apartment shared by seven recruits. They depended on the recruiting firm for transportation, but it arrived sporadically, Zarred said.

The contract he signed showed that he was charged \$10 a month for a hot line to call the recruiter in such instances, but Zarred never used it and wasn't certain what it was. He was charged \$4 a month for Internet service he never used, \$12 for a doctor he never saw and \$25 for a maintenance fee, according to a copy of a co-worker's contract he copied by hand.

What money remained was too little to save for a car or the security deposit on an apartment, Micronesian workers said. At the end of their one-year contracts, North Pacific offered them a chance to sign up for another year, but it didn't offer them a return ticket home.

### **The irresistible pitch**

Another recruit, Penelope Hainrick, had been a high school tutor in Pohnpei, earning \$5 an hour, a good salary on the island. She had lived with her parents and never paid rent.

But North Pacific's pitch was irresistible: The recruiter promised she would have an apartment, paid utilities, health insurance and Web TV.

"It was really good," she said. "Just too good."

When she landed at SeaWorld in 1998, Hainrick found herself crowded into a tiny Orlando apartment with four adult strangers.

After North Pacific deducted \$85 from her paycheck each week for housing and other expenses, there was little or nothing to send home to her parents and 5-year-old son. She and other recruits said they had to pay North Pacific's van driver \$1 per person each way to take them to work. It was \$5 each way to go to the grocery store. And she was charged for utilities.

Hainrick married a co-worker from American Samoa, became pregnant and began suffering from potassium deficiency. Too weak to work, she worried that the health insurance North Pacific offered would not cover her fully. She tried to work the required 32 hours to keep the superior insurance provided by SeaWorld, but sometimes would faint at her food stand. With no car to drive home, she sometimes slept in a closet, waiting for her husband to get off work.

After completing her contract, Hainrick moved out of company housing and told Bencivenga she wanted the money she had been promised for a plane ticket home.

The standard North Pacific contract mentions return airfare, but no promises are made. "It is anticipated but not guaranteed," it says, that North Pacific would "accumulate \$500 by the end of the employment contract for use toward the purchase of a ticket for client to fly from Orlando to Micronesia."

"I said I wanted a copy of my contract, I want the money. I want the whole thing," Hainrick said. "I never got it."

She has a son now and tries not to think about the year she spent with North Pacific. But she expresses concern about those she left behind.

"Bencivenga says now [that] if people flee from the program, the ones left will pay for their mistakes," she said. "Those are his words."

### **Lawsuits and threats**

If workers leave assignments to seek more lucrative employment, they risk being taken to court and having their paychecks on their next job attached. Not all recruiting companies carry through on their threats, but some, notably North Pacific, are quick to go to court.

Olfer "Oliver" Repid and his wife, Malinda Daniel, both North Pacific recruits hired by SeaWorld, were sued in Osceola County Circuit Court when they tried to escape their contracts with Bencivenga.

The broker's partner in Micronesia, Hubert Yamada, dunned Daniel's elderly mother, Isako Wisiel, threatening that her daughter could wind up in jail, the women said.

"Whatever the technicalities are, we have to do what we can to recoup our expenses," Yamada said.

Now, the couple is paying the price. To settle the lawsuit, they agreed to pay \$5,100, including \$375 to reimburse Bencivenga for the cost of hiring a lawyer. The debt is being paid at the rate of \$250 a month, an amount the couple struggles to scrape together.

They spent a considerable amount for international telephone calls to a Legal Services lawyer in Pohnpei, who told them how to file briefs challenging the suit. They did so, asserting that they had signed documents in Micronesia that were not binding in the United States.

But the legal struggle was too daunting and they ended up settling.

"I don't have the money to pay a lawyer," Repid said.

When Bencivenga sued several other of his former recruits, their new employer, Mease Hospital, hired a lawyer to represent them. Bencivenga also sued the hospital, arguing that North Pacific was "substantially damaged" when Micronesians he had signed to "exclusive client-agent agreements" were recruited to work at Mease.

The hospital, in Dunedin north of Tampa on Florida's Gulf Coast, had recruited dozens of Micronesians to work as nursing assistants and in its dietary department, some from North Pacific and others by direct recruiting in Micronesia.

The hospital's response to the lawsuits contended that the contracts signed by the Micronesians are not legally binding in the United States because they are contrary to public policy. The lawsuits are pending.

Arkat Harrison Panuel, who was recruited by North Pacific in 1999 and later sued by Bencivenga, said he left his \$6.70 an hour job at Busch Gardens for a job at Mease because North Pacific was deducting nearly half his biweekly paycheck for various fees.

"It was not what they promised," Panuel said.

### **Bonds of convenience**

While some recruiters, such as Bencivenga, cling to their income-producing workers, the bond is easily broken when convenient.

Sicky Shim, 42, a former high school librarian from Micronesia, journeyed to Bay Minette, Ala., where he went to work in July 2000 as a nursing assistant at William F. Green Veterans Home. A sign at the facility proclaims, "Proudly serving America's finest."

The Pohnpei native had lost his job at the school, worked for a time at a hotel in Hawaii, returned home and applied for a librarian's post, then signed with a recruiter after failing to get the job.

Shim was among a half-dozen Micronesian recruits sharing a narrow, three-room mobile home that sits rusting in a trailer park across the Styx River, three miles from the veterans home.

That December, Shim and other Micronesians moved to another trailer park closer to work. Five people lived in the yellow-and-white, two-room trailer - its windows wedged shut with wood slats.

Shim's long journey in search of opportunity would end just a few weeks later. Early on the morning of Jan. 28, he and his girlfriend of four months, Airlene Stanley, were shot to death by her ex-husband, who would later plead guilty to murder and be sentenced to life in prison.

Within days of the killings, the other Micronesians working at the veterans home "just up and left," said Oscar Dumas, 76, a longtime resident.

A forgotten wallet belonging to one of them was turned in to the trailer park manager. Inside is an identification card and two pictures. One shows a smiling young couple standing before a familiar Pohnpei mountain.

For three months, Shim's body lay on a slab at Baldwin Chapel, a Bay Minette funeral home. His family, thousands of miles away, could not afford to ship his body home. No one else would take responsibility.

Glenn B. Jano, the island broker who recruited Shim, said he had had no contact with his recruits since they went to America.

"After they left here, I don't know what happened to them," Jano said. "I don't have any connection with the employer. I'm really sorry, but what can we do?"

Officials at the veterans home where Shim and Stanley worked referred questions to U.S.A. Healthcare, which runs the facility for the state. Company officials refused to respond to requests for information about how Shim was recruited and brought to the United States.

In late April, with no other choice, officials at the Micronesian Embassy in Washington provided money to send Shim's body home.

"Everybody just walked away," said Tanya Harris, the embassy's first secretary.