Heritage awareness seminar today

The heritage awareness seminar kicks off today at the Office on Aging in Chinatown.

The seminar, a joint project by Flinders University of Australia, in cooperation with Pacific Marine Resources Institute, and Florida Public Archaeology Network, is a free seminar aimed at providing course directors, instructor trainers, dive shop owners, instructors, dive masters, and dive boat tour operators, “with greater knowledge on how to proactively protect shipwrecks, aircraft wrecks, vehicle wrecks, artificial reefs, and other underwater cultural sites.”

Visiting archaeologist and heritage trail project lead Dr. Jennifer McKinnon told Variety, “I will be bringing with me some of the underwater dive guides for the heritage trail we’ve been working on.”

McKinnon said they are almost finished and she’s hoping to have all guides and posters printed and available on island in May.

She told Variety that she will show these materials during the free seminar on heritage awareness.

The classroom session will consist of lectures by Dr. Della Scott-Ireton of Florida Public Archaeology Network, McKinnon, Ronnie Rogers of the Historic Preservation Office, and Guy Macaranas of CNMI Coastal Resources Management Office.

Scott-Ireton will provide an introductory course in archaeology, shipwrecks, and ship construction. She will also tackle conservation issues.

McKinnon will talk about maritime heritage and what are expected on such sites and what are included in the World War II underwater heritage trail on Saipan. Her lecture also delves into artificial reefs.

Rogers’ lecture will focus on laws protecting submerged cultural resources.

Moreover, the classroom-based learning will be followed by in-field training that includes SCUBA dive on the Kawanishi H8K “Emily” plane wreck and a dive on the PBM Mariner plane wreck.

In an interview with Variety, McKinnon mentioned updates on the vessels they found during their last visit.

“We have done quite a bit of research and learned much more about the vessels we’re investigating,” she said adding that all these new pieces of information will be printed in the guides and posters to be distributed at no cost to dive shops, tour companies, and Marianas Visitors Authority.

She said the original copies will stay with the Historic Preservation Office for reprinting should the need for more copies arises.

Variety learned that McKinnon’s group will be doing additional mapping underwater on another site not related to the proposed trail.

“We’ve completed all the fieldwork for the trail and are now working on the final report and getting the
brochures printed,” McKinnon said.

She also said she’ll provide updates on the trail in a half-hour TV program on April 13 with John O. Gonzales.

The underwater heritage trail project was made possible through a $49,967 grant approved by the National Park Service under the American Battlefield Protection Program that provided funding for an underwater survey of World War II objects in the Saipan lagoon.

The survey revealed three tanks, four airplanes, two landing craft, a possible sub-chaser, a freighter and an LVT or a landing vehicle tracked — a class of amphibious vehicles introduced by the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and Army during World War II.

McKinnon previously discussed the prospects for an underwater heritage tourism in the CNMI.

According to McKinnon, there was a previous study in Florida — Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation in Florida — revealing that the state earns $4 billion annually from investments in heritage tourism.

The study showed that historic preservation activities in Florida resulted in $657 million in tax revenues with tourists spending about $3.7 billion a year.