



QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Iraqis are uniting against al-Qaeda.” – Outgoing U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad

VIEWPOINTS



A ship waits to embark from the Jaxport Cruise Terminal in Jacksonville, Fla. – AP

# A money pit Baltimore should avoid

By Antero Pietila

Next month, Norfolk will inaugurate its \$36 million Half Moone Cruise and Celebration Center. The downtown riverfront glass palace can accommodate the largest cruise ships in the world — which is wonderful, except fewer cruises are scheduled to visit Norfolk this year than at any time since 2001.

“What I can’t figure out is, when the new cruise terminal opens, who comes in?” Michael Driscoll, editor of Cruise Week, told The Virginian-Pilot. Only 17 sailings are scheduled for this season, down from 62 in 2004 and nine fewer than last year.

Like Norfolk, Baltimore was among a handful of East Coast cities overflowing with cruise traffic following Sept. 11. The 2001 terrorist attacks scattered dozens of departures away from New York City, leading some local tourism officials to predict Baltimore would be a major home port. They urged the Maryland Port Administration to build a glitzy, taxpayer-financed cruise terminal.

Six years later, New York (with Bayonne, N.J.) has more than recaptured its year-round cruise business, and operators have largely abandoned smaller East Coast cities, including Baltimore.

Only Royal Caribbean still uses Baltimore as a seasonal home port,

with 29 sailings to Bermuda, the Caribbean and Canada scheduled from here. If Royal Caribbean pulls away for any reason, Baltimore could lose the cruise business altogether.

My wife and I have witnessed this shift. We took our maiden voyage in 2002, attracted by the convenience of departing from and arriving in Baltimore. By 2003, ships and itineraries had changed, prompting us to drive to Charleston, S.C., then to Jacksonville, Fla. to embark. The last two times we departed from New York. When we completed our latest cruise last week, our drive time from the terminal in Manhattan to Baltimore was three hours and 15 minutes. Not bad.

On paper, Baltimore should be an ideal cruise port. The city draws from an area including not only the populous mid-Atlantic region but, thanks to cut-rate airlines serving BWI, much of the Midwest and Canada. Yet that apparently is not enough to compensate for the some 12 hours lost each time a ship navigates up and down the Chesapeake Bay. On short cruises every hour makes a difference.

The cruise business is at a crossroads, with rapid U.S. passenger growth slowing. As a result, industry giants are diversifying by increasingly operating throughout the world. Companies reposition ships that ply the Caribbean in the winter to Europe for the summer. Some go

to South America and Asia.

Only a handful of big operators dominate the world’s cruise business. The giant Carnival Corp., which used to serve Baltimore, owns such other brands as Holland America, Princess and Cunard. Another biggie is Royal Caribbean. It still serves Baltimore, but withdrew its premium brand, Celebrity, from here several years ago.

Up to this point, the Maryland Port Administration has prudently avoided the bottomless money pit of building a trophy terminal, although banker Ed Hale wanted one to crown his expanding waterfront fiefdom in Canton. Instead, the cruise terminal was shifted from the Dundalk Marine Terminal to state-owned land in South Locust Point. The site abuts I-95, with easy connections to BWI.

For the time being, this looks like a perfectly satisfactory solution. The fact is no one chooses a cruise because of a terminal. Instead, pricing and itinerary determine a successful cruise experience.

A trophy cruise terminal is one money hole Baltimore should avoid.

*Antero Pietila is writing a book about how bigotry shaped the Baltimore metropolitan area. Starting today, his columns will appear every other Wednesday in The Examiner. He can be reached at hap5905@hotmail.com.*

# CHRISTIAN JOHANSSON

## Charm City’s hidden charms

Come on, admit it. Didn’t you laugh to yourself just a little bit the first time you heard Forbes.com named Baltimore one of the top five cities for singles in the country?

But then it kept happening. Leading travel guide publisher Frommer’s named Baltimore one of the top ten up-and-coming travel destinations in the world. Baltimore ranked seventh in a survey of best cities for relocating families, according to Worldwide ERC, a membership association of relocation managers.

And it didn’t stop there. Baltimore ranked seventh among America’s top 25 arts destinations, due in no small measure to our incredible cultural heritage and institutions such as the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Walters, the Hippodrome, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, the American Visionary Arts Museum, and Centerstage.

The National Aquarium in Baltimore has received praise, too. Zagat’s U.S. Family Travel Guide named it the second-best aquarium in the country in terms of family appeal.

Baltimore, in fact, always ranks impressively. Much of that appeal stems from the area’s outstanding quality of life. If you already live here, it may be easy to take our quality of life for granted. But where else in the country can you live near the ocean and the mountains? Where else is horse country or waterfront on the Chesapeake Bay within a half-hour’s drive of each other? Where else can you find quaint, small towns such as Annapolis, Ellicott City, Havre de Grace and Westminster — all just a short drive from Baltimore’s vibrant downtown?

And I haven’t even mentioned the area’s many top universities, its professional sports scene, its clusters of internationally renowned information technology and defense firms, its concentration of federal labs and, now, BioParks — all within a short distance of the nation’s capital.

While we sometimes forget about the rich lifestyle this region offers, much of the country is clearly noticing. Our quality of life deserves much of the credit for Maryland being chosen one the winning states for BRAC — the Base Realignment and Closure program expected to shift thousands of federal jobs to this area.

Over the next six years, BRAC will bring more than 45,000 jobs to Maryland, with most going to the areas surrounding Aberdeen Proving Ground and Fort Meade. Federal contractors relocating here are expected to create many of those jobs, primarily in the fields of communications, electronics, engineering and information technology.

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So what is it about our quality of life that has proven so attractive for BRAC? In addition to the culture, the arts, the sports and so much more, greater Baltimore consistently ranks high in one more survey: It is one of the top five major military communities, based on housing choices, public school districts, spousal employment and recreational opportunities.

BRAC-affected employees and contractors are quickly learning about this area’s lifestyle options and world-class amenities. But to make certain they recognize what a great region this is — and to ensure we take full advantage of the incredible economic development opportunity offered by BRAC — the Economic Alliance of Greater Baltimore and our regional partners have created a campaign promoting our outstanding quality of life: “World Class Living, Hometown Life.”

This is truly a partnership effort, with every jurisdiction in Metropolitan Baltimore contributing to welcome this influx of jobs and people. In Baltimore City, for example, Mayor Dixon has already been leading the charge by allocating significant funds to the Live Baltimore budget in order to recruit BRAC employees and families to Baltimore City.

The bottom line is this: Many regions competed for BRAC, but in the end greater Baltimore — thanks in large part to its tremendous quality of life — won. We should all be proud of the world-class living and the hometown life that has made greater Baltimore the place we call home.

*Christian S. Johansson is the president and CEO of the Economic Alliance of Greater Baltimore, a public/private partnership that markets the greater Baltimore region.*

