

Let's band together and put an end to this Divine madness



BARB GUY

I wrote about Divine Strake once before. In a draft of that earlier column, I called it a "bomb test."

A wise friend said I couldn't say "bomb" because Divine Strake will measure not a bomb but an explosion of ANFO, the fertilizer concoction Timothy McVeigh made famous. (How did he make it famous? By "bomb"-ing the federal building in Oklahoma City.)

I omitted the word out of respect for my friend but I never fully comprehended the subtle nuance - and it would surely be lost on those who went to work at the Murrah Federal Building that morning in 1995 - but that world-class word wrangle warmed me up well for last Wednesday's public information session on Divine Strake at the Grand America Hotel.

By the end of the evening, more words, words like "public" and

"information," would be called into question.

The session was to be at - and I've never had to write this before - EnergySolutions Arena, but at the last minute the venue changed to the Imperial Room at the Grand America. There's a lot there for a person to ponder.

First, the mysterious move. Did the Defense Threat Reduction Agency dread being seen with the Melta Center, or was it vice versa? Or was it about minimizing attendance and dissent? In an atmosphere like the Imperial Room, imaginations can run wild and conspiracy theories can pop, unbidden, into the minds of rational people.

Not to take this word business too far, but most folks who were at the meeting feel we'd have a Grandeur, less Imperial-ist, America if only we'd quit devising new ways to bomb, no matter what we call the ensuing explosion.

How do I know this? Usually at a public hearing you get to hear what folks think as they step to a microphone and comment for the record, but this public information session was more like a sedate trade show, with tables quietly staffed by the Department of Energy National Nuclear Security Administration Nevada Test Site Office (whew!) and the Department of Defense's

Defense Threat Reduction Agency.

One fellow hollered out to ask if people were against the proposed test. The room erupted in the affirmative and off-duty police officers in sportcoats rushed to unceremoniously escort the guy out. People asked why he was being ejected and the response was, "This is a private meeting." Wait. No. So their Divine Intervention, if you will, was one sign of trouble.

I met Aralee Scothern in the Imperial Room. She attributes the deaths of some family members to past nuclear testing. She said, "In the '50s they told us it was safe. My father got close enough to see the mushroom cloud with binoculars. The whole crew he went with died of cancer."

A number of the good people who saved us from the MX Missile were there, some complaining of being too old to go through all this again, but yet there they were, ready to fight the Divine Strake test.

Thus, the brightest spot of the evening for me was meeting Kerry Stephenson and his Troop 973 Boy Scouts, Roberto Unzaga, Johnny Thackeray and Ryan Hilton. They were working on their Citizenship badges and they're all aspiring Eagle Scouts.

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Kerry had the presence of mind to do what we all should be doing, mentoring the next generation of concerned, involved Utahns. Kerry probably doesn't care what his Boy Scouts think about Divine Strake, he just wants them to be engaged citizens.

I hope this charming Boy Scout leader and his charges come to the next Divine Strake meeting, this one sponsored by Gov. Jon Huntsman. I think the governor is a pretty good guy and I trust that at his "public hearing" the public will be heard.

The hearing is Jan. 24, at the Utah State Capitol West Building, Room 135, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Come and bring the kids.

BARB GUY is a regular contributor to these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.