

Friends' Annual Meeting 2003 is a Big Hit



The Friends held their best Annual Meeting ever this year with a large crowd of over 200 people and influential keynote speaker, Fran Mainella, Director of the National Park Service. Cinnamon Bay Camp-ground graciously provided its space once again at T'ree Lizards Restaurant on the afternoon of January 12th.

The meeting began with the swearing in of two new members of the Friends' Board of Directors, Fraser Drummond and Lawrence Boschulte. Fraser and Larry both bring a tremendous amount of expertise and talent to the Friends' Board. Fraser is a 15-year resident of St. John and a business executive in St. Thomas. Larry is a St. Thomas businessman and entrepreneur. Joe Kessler, Friends President, presented the Friends' Annual Report. He detailed the activities and accomplishments of last year and laid out the Friends' plans and objectives for 2003.

At every Annual Meeting, the Friends and the Park recognize those who contributed the most through volunteer service by presenting "Volunteer of the Year" awards. The Friends named Edward "Harmon" Killebrew, project director at Hassel Island, who has tirelessly helped to restore Creque Marine Railway and make the site accessible to future visitors. Virgin Islands National Park awarded Velma Pullen who has been volunteering at the Visitor Center's library and front desk for more than 20 years. Both Harmon's and Velma's names are engraved on a plaque which can be seen at the Visitor Center in Cruz Bay. **Thank you volunteers!**

Superintendent John King presented the State of the Park Address. He announced the commencement of a number of projects that will improve the Park this year. However, due to budget cuts, a shortfall of \$2.6 million and 32 staff will make it difficult for Virgin Islands National Park to achieve as much as they would like.

Our keynote speaker, National Park Service Director Fran Mainella, flew in from Washington, D.C. to discuss the importance of becoming more "fiscally innovative." She spoke of the need to strengthen volunteerism, outreach programs and the importance of public-private partnerships. She also took this opportunity to praise the Friends for being such a fine model of advocacy for our National Parks. Virgin Islands' Delegate to Congress, Donna Christensen, also attended and offered thoughtful comments to the gathering.

VI National Park Named as One of the "Ten Most Endangered National Parks in the US"

Virgin Islands National Park was identified by the National Parks Conservation Association as one of the ten most endangered national parks in the United States. NPCA is a respected national advocacy organization dedicated to safeguarding the scenic beauty, wildlife, historic and cultural treasures of the National Parks System.

This may have come as a surprise to some "Friends", while others may have seen this coming for some time. As we are regularly awed by the beauty and serenity of Virgin Islands National Park it may be difficult to think of it as endangered. But then we think about the threats confronting our Park:

- Delays on the part of the National Park Service to implement the marine reserve provisions of the VI Coral Reef National Monument; it is no wonder that fish populations continue to decline.
- Development of in-holdings within the Park, and the potential development of additional large in-holdings, obviously reduces habitat for native fauna, spoils the "viewscape," and damages the reefs with silt and other effects of erosion.
- Overcrowding and overuse of the Park's limited resources by more than 1.2 million visitors annually, makes it obvious that our Park is literally being loved to death.

To confront these threats: the NPS must implement regulations for the management of the VI Coral Reef National Monument; Congress has to make up the Park's budget shortfall of about \$2.6 million annually for operations and staff; those constructing homes on in-holdings must be more vigilant about stopping harmful runoff and other environmental damage, and be more sensitive to the ecological and visual concerns of building within a national park; and, the other owners of large in-holdings should be persuaded to either sell their land to the Park or otherwise arrange for it to be protected in perpetuity.

As a member of the Friends, and obviously someone who cares deeply for Virgin Islands National Park, there are several things that *you* can do:

- You can urge the NPS Director to immediately issue interim regulations concerning the VI Coral Reef National Monument.
- You can urge your legislative representatives to support increased funding for national parks in general and VI National Park in particular. As an organization with members from every state in the US we can have an important voice here.
- You can learn more about coral reefs and how to protect marine resources.

Virgin Islands National Park is a unique national treasure. Your help is needed to protect and preserve it for generations to come.

• TIDINGS NOTES •

Summer Intern Wanted!

Interested in spending the summer on St. John working for the Friends? Each summer we have an internship available for approximately 8 – 10 weeks, June through August. The position includes housing at Maho Bay Camps and a small weekly stipend. If interested, please send resumes and letters of inquiry to Emily Burton, Program Manager at amigos@friendsvinp.org.

Friends Announce Annual Academic Scholarship Program

We have launched our 2nd Annual Scholarship Program with the aim of encouraging study, among Virgin Islanders at the university level, in fields related to Natural Resource Management or Protection. The program offers scholarships to two students entering their junior or senior year at an accredited university with a major in an appropriate discipline such as Marine Biology, Botany, Ecology, Forestry, etc.... The scholarships will be in the amount of \$1000 per academic year and will continue through the senior year. Additionally, the scholarship recipients will be offered summer internships with the Friends during the summers before their junior and senior years. Friends' President Joe Kessler said, "The Scholarship Program has become a very important piece in our Environmental Education mandate and we are very excited by the prospect of helping Virgin Islanders prepare for careers in natural resource fields."

Carabana Presents Queen Mary

The Friends is, once again, proud to sponsor the Carabana Ensemble Theater production *Queen Mary*, the story of the Caribbean woman and former slave who led the St. Croix Labor Revolt of 1878. The play is set in the Frederiksted market, and Queen Mary comes to life on the 150th anniversary of the revolt, also known colloquially as "The Fire Burn." The play is written and directed by Clarence Cuthbertson. Carla Sewer portrays the Crucian heroine. Held at the Cinnamon Bay Amphitheater on Thursdays at 8:30 pm, *Queen Mary* will run through April. Admission to the play is free.

Interactive Education Kiosk Debuts at Park's Visitor Center

Thanks to the generosity of Friends' members Bill & Joan Gross, there is a new, interactive education kiosk at the Park's Visitor Center. Using the latest technology, the program explains the ecological value of marine and near shore habitats with video photography showing dramatic changes in habitat over recent years at several local sites. The program finishes with a discussion of the causes of habitat degradation, solutions to the problems and techniques for managing the impacts.

This interactive experience will leave visitors more aware of their own impact on this fragile earth and more knowledgeable about the challenges of protecting natural resources. To achieve our mission, it is crucial to educate people about the ecology of the island. Interactive computer technology provides a blend of visual and hands-on methods likely to engage most audiences. Thank you, Bill & Joan!

News From VINP

By John King
Superintendent VINP



Hello Friends! High season is in full bloom and park visitors are everywhere – hiking, snorkeling, diving, sailing, lounging on our beautiful, white-sand beaches, and soaking up the rich cultural history of the Virgin Islands. I hope that you are among those enjoying this crown jewel of the Caribbean.

These are exciting times: Let me share just a few of the many things going on in the Park. The Notice of Intent to prepare a General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement for the Virgin Islands National Park and Coral Reef National Monument has just been published in the Federal Register. We will now commence the planning process that will lead to a new General Management Plan (GMP) for the Park and an inaugural GMP for the Monument. What a great opportunity we have to shape the future of these special park units!

Our new "Rent-A-Ranger" program is operational and has been well received. This program allows us to provide specialized interpretive programs and tours to our commercial partners. This is an excellent way to supplement our interpretive staff while expanding the programs we offer. Additionally, the program enables us to reach a larger segment of our visitor community with a park and conservation-related message.

We are proceeding with activation efforts for the new Coral Reef National Monument. Interim regulations have been prepared and will be published soon, a hurricane mooring system will be installed in Hurricane Hole, a modest number of recreational day-use moorings will be placed throughout the Monument, and the waters will be managed essentially as a marine protected area. We're looking forward to being involved in the birthing of a new national park unit.

We have hired a transportation consultant to assist in developing an Alternative Transportation Plan for the Park. Our long-range goal is to have a shuttle system operating in the Park that will transport visitors throughout the area on a regular schedule and at a reasonable rate. This system will not replace the safari bus/taxi operations, but will supplement those transportation providers.

Our proposed mooring fee program is scheduled to start within the next few months. We expect this to generate approximately \$400,000 per year that we will use to improve park facilities and enhance the level of visitor services that we provide.

We anticipate groundbreaking by May 1 for the rehabilitation of the Hawksnest Beach complex. This will lead to new picnic pavilions, restrooms, and changing rooms. Plans are also being prepared for the redevelopment of the Maho Bay facilities. Both projects are being funded through user fees collected at Trunk Bay and Annaberg.

These are but a few of the many things currently happening in the Park. Let me say again, how much I appreciate your interest in, commitment to, love for and support of the Park. Friends like you are what make this place special.

Hope to see you out in the Park!

ST. JOHN ADVENTURE WITH ARAWAK EXPEDITIONS

Our newest Affinity Partner, Arawak Expeditions, will be offering a terrific kayak expedition package around the beautiful island of St. John as an exclusive benefit to the Friends of Virgin Islands National Park. From October 6–10, Arawak Expeditions will lead 10–12 kayakers and two guides on a “St. John Adventure.” The tour will depart from Cruz Bay and completely circumnavigate the island. The itinerary, of course, will include St. John’s popular north shore. However, kayakers will also experience the quieter sides of St. John and explore secluded beaches and coves. Planned overnight stops are at Cinnamon Bay Campground, Maho Bay Camps, Vie’s East End Campground and V.I.E.R.S. at Lameshur Bay. The price for the five day trip is \$995. Included are four nights lodging, all meals, and five days of kayaking. Book early as space is limited. No previous kayaking experience is necessary, but guests are expected to be in good physical condition. Arawak Expeditions, now in its tenth year of operation, is led by a small group of outdoor enthusiasts and their love for these islands is great. Their mission is to provide safe, enjoyable expeditions while having the least impact possible on the natural environment. For more information, please call Kim Lyons at the Friends 779-4940.



Gullah Meets Creole: 12th Annual Folklife Celebration at Annaberg

The Friends has a special way of celebrating Black History Month: Since 1996, we have helped to sponsor the National Park’s Folklife Celebration at the historic Annaberg Plantation. This year almost 4,000 people attended this three-day celebration, including a large number of school children from St. Thomas, St. John and even Tortola. The event was replete with talented artisans and craftspeople demonstrating their own special pieces of history and culture. Virgin Islands’ own venerated educators like Guy Benjamin and Dr. Gilbert Sprauve gave presentations on VI History. Aromas of traditional West Indian foods cooking on site in an old stone oven filled the air. Mr. Mario Benjamin could be found with his fingers deftly weaving an old-time fishing net. And of course, traditional music and Afro-Caribbean drumming kept everyone moving. It was the perfect way to celebrate Black History Month in the Virgin Islands.

Managed by Park Ranger Denise Georges, this year’s celebration was the best ever! Held on February 20–22, 2003, the *12th Annual Folklife Celebration: Gullah Meets Creole; A Cultural Exchange* also featured artists from the Gullah Islands. Marquetta Goodwine traveled from St. Helena Island to St. John and was the star attraction. Queen Quet, as she is called, is the Queen and High Priestess of the Gullah Nation of some 500,000 people in the Sea Islands off the eastern coast of the United States. She was the feature of this year’s celebration, as she demonstrated the similarities of cultures in the African Diaspora as seen in the Gullah Islands and the Virgin Islands. She was able to draw some amazing parallels in shared customs of each region, such as language, foods and other practices. Another special guest of the Celebration was Barbara Taggart, Historian with the National Park Service in Atlanta. Barbara conducted an informative, daylong workshop on the history and significance of Harriet Tubman and Underground Railroad Network.

The Celebration was a tremendous success and we look forward to next year. Special thanks to our sponsors American Airlines, First Bank of the Virgin Islands, Caneel Bay Inc, West Indian Company, Virgin Islands Council on the Arts and Atlantis Submarines.



Friends Kicks Off Adopt-A-Trail Program

The Friends has launched a new volunteer-led program offering residents the opportunity to give something back to St. John. It’s called the Adopt-A-Beach/Bay/Trail program: businesses, community organizations, school groups, etc. can adopt a particular area and assist in its maintenance. St. John’s beaches and trails undergo heavy use during the tourist season, and with the Park Service’s limited resources, it’s difficult to keep these areas clean and looking their best.

With assistance from the Friends and the Park Service, the program encourages residents to become stewards of a beach or trail of their choice and clean it up periodically. The first of these clean-ups was on February 27th, as a local hiking group agreed to adopt the northern coastline area from Brown Bay to Leinster Bay. Skinny Legs, The Audubon Society, The Historic Society and other volunteers from the community all joined together to beautify the beaches. All in all, 20 volunteers participated in this clean up, gathering almost 80 bags of trash. What a great team effort!

Any businesses, groups or organizations interested in participating in the Adopt-A-Beach/Bay/Trail program, contact Emily at 779-4940.

Friends Creates Advisory Council

The first meetings of the newly formed Friends Advisory Council were held on January 30th and February 18th. At these meetings Joe Kessler presented a full briefing on the Friends; and, Park Superintendent John King briefed the group on the current projects and activities, challenges facing the Park and future plans. The aim of the meeting was to provide the participants with the information they need to effectively function as council members.

The Friends established the Advisory Council to provide advice and counsel to the Board of Directors in matters of importance such as projects and activities undertaken by the Friends, Friends' external relationships, fundraising, and advocacy positions taken by the Friends.

John Fuller, Chairman of the Board, expects that "the Advisory Council will provide an opportunity to incorporate broader diversity of opinion in Board decisions and/or deliberations, allow for greater participation in the Friends from a broader cross-section of the community, donors and others with a stake in the Friends and/or the Virgin

Islands National Park, and it will serve as a pool for recruitment for Board of Directors' succession."

While the Advisory Council can have a maximum of 20 members, fourteen have been chosen so far. The current members are: Myron Allick, Elsa Angel, Rob Blakeney, Hal Brown, Graeme Davis, Anne Marie Estes, Julien Harley, Ray Joseph, Irene Patton, Jose Penn, Helen Porter, Earl Thomas, Brian Young and Rafael Wesselhoft.

The main roles and functions of the Advisory Council include:

- Keep abreast of issues related to Virgin Islands National Park and the Friends
- Advise on Friends' programs, operations, short and long-term plans, relationships and advocacy positions
- Participate in discussions on funding priorities vis à vis the Park's annual support request
- Assist fundraising and membership recruitment efforts

The Advisory Council will meet 3-4 times a year and the next meeting is planned for May 13th.

President's Message



By Joe Kessler

You read earlier about Virgin Islands National Park being named as one of the ten most endangered national parks in the country. As I am sure you are, I am very concerned that the Park's resources have declined, or are threatened, to the point that the Park has received this dubious

recognition. However, we must look at this as a wake-up call and as an opportunity to rally support for this park that we cherish so much.

We noted some ways that you, as a "friend" of VI National Park and someone dedicated to helping preserve and protect this unique national park for our enjoyment today and for future generations, can help confront these threats. I do hope that you will make your voice heard on enacting regulations for VI Coral Reef National Monument

and on increasing appropriations so that our Park can acquire development-threatened in-holdings as well as meet its \$2.6 million budget deficit. And, if you are going to be building on St. John, please be very sensitive to the ecological and visual impacts of your project and employ environmentally responsible design and construction practices. I hope that you will also continue your generous support of the Park via the Friends.

Through our projects, advocacy and environmental education efforts, we work tirelessly at helping make Virgin Islands National Park a model of resource protection and cultural preservation. However, we can only be successful with your support – your generous financial support and you generously giving of your time as volunteers.

Aside from the people of St. John, Virgin Islands National Park is what makes the island so special. And most importantly, it is what will help keep St. John so special. You have shown that Virgin Islands National Park is important to you – now is the time to come forward and help us confront the challenges that threaten it. Thank you!



P.O. Box 811
St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands 00831
Phone: 340-779-4940 • Fax: 340-693-9973
www.friendsvinp.org

