



*Photo courtesy of Steve Simonsen*

## Major Victory in the Fight to Save Estate Maho Bay!

The Trust for Public Land (TPL), a national nonprofit land conservation organization and important partner of the Friends, announced in August that they signed a contract to purchase six of the remaining seven interests in Estate Maho Bay, (the 415-acre parcel that encompasses all of the land from the basin beginning at Maho Bay beach up to Centerline Road and Mamey Peak). The signing of this contract brings the number of shares owned by either the NPS or TPL to 10, and ensures that the bulk of this land will be preserved.

For the past five years, TPL, with assistance from the Friends, has been working to preserve Maho Bay. TPL purchased one interest three years ago as well as several other smaller, adjacent parcels. TPL's efforts in acquiring the remaining seven interests, still held by the heirs, were thwarted a year and a half ago when James Simons, a New York billionaire, contracted to purchase the property. Since this was a legal transaction between private buyers and sellers there was little that concerned outside parties could do.

When it became known Simon's plans for the development of the Maho land included moving the beachfront road inland, draining the wetlands, and constructing a 120' dock in the bay, these plans were met with fierce opposition from the NPS, Friends membership, and nearly the entire St. John community. Friends members and members of the community will remember our Op-Ed pieces and letters to the editor in local papers informing the community about Simon's plans, and our letter and e-mail campaign that helped reinforce the NPS's opposition to these plans. When Simons realized the scale of opposition to his plans and that it was unlikely he would be granted permits for his road, wetland, and dock plans, he allowed his contract to expire which opened the door for TPL to resume discussions with the heirs.

Three key parties each played an essential role in the efforts to preserve Maho Bay. One of those parties was TPL, lead by the director

of TPL's Southwest Florida office and former president of the Friends, John Garrison. John's dedication, persistence, and creativity clearly contributed to making this preservation campaign a reality. Another party critical to the success of this effort is an exceptionally generous donor, (a private foundation that wishes to remain anonymous), that financed the purchase. Last, but not least, are the heirs and owners of the six interests who sought to preserve as much of Estate Maho Bay as possible. Their foresight and commitment to the preservation of this magnificent area should be a model for others.

There is still more to be done and TPL will work to finalize all of the details in the next few months, as well as continue efforts to acquire the eleventh, and final, interest in Estate Maho Bay.

## 2006 Summer Eco-Camps

Summer has ended, and for Virgin Islands' students that means back to school; but not all students had to wait for the return of the school year to see friends and engage their minds. This summer, 163 V.I. students between the ages of 8–14 years of age attended Summer Eco-Camps at Virgin Islands Environmental Resource Station thanks to the cooperation and funding provided by Friends of Virgin Islands National Park, VIERS, Clean Islands International, the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI), and many generous donors.



The two-night three-day Summer Eco-Camps are designed to teach V.I. students about their island environment through hands-on learning. While at camp, students participate in various conservation themed activities, games, and projects that provide them with an understanding of the marine and terrestrial ecosystems that exist here in the V.I. The curriculum for this year's camp was based on the recently published *Island Peak to Coral Reef: A Field Guide to the Plant and Marine Communities of the Virgin Islands*, by Toni Thomas and Dr. Barry Devine. Each child was not only able to use this comprehensive field guide while at camp, but was also given a copy to

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### Friends' Mission:

*The Friends of Virgin Islands National Park is dedicated to the protection and preservation of the natural and cultural resources of Virgin Islands National Park and promotes the responsible enjoyment of this unique national treasure.*

## From the Superintendent



### *Greetings Friends of Virgin Islands National Park*

It feels as though it was just yesterday when I reported for duty as superintendent of Virgin Islands National Park. Now, within a few short weeks, I will be departing St. John and moving to Atlanta where I will serve as the Deputy Regional Director for the Southeast Region.

Once I was notified of the selection, I was of course excited, however, I did experience a sense of bewilderment about leaving Virgin Islands National Park (VINP), the St. John community, and the great relationship that I have experienced between the Park and the Friends of Virgin Islands National Park.

The union between the Friends and the Park in efforts to protect and preserve the natural beauty and uphold the mission of Virgin Islands National Park made my decision to depart rather difficult. Working

with the Friends has truly been a rewarding experience, particularly when I think about the accomplishments we have achieved during my tenure. We have had countless successes related to Park operations, and have also implemented some effective community-based programs. As superintendent, I am proud that, with your help, we were able to achieve these successes, which helped further promote the mission of VINP.

I am certain that my successor will enjoy working with the Friends. Moreover, I am confident that the leadership of the Friends will continue to be effective in working with the Park for the continued advancement of the VINP mission. Thus, I extend my sincerest gratitude to the Friends' President, Board, Staff, and members for supporting the Park during my superintendency. Your tireless support and cooperation with the Park for the preservation, protection, and interpretation of the resources of one of the true gems in the National Park Service is greatly appreciated and is an experience that will remain with me forever. Thank you.

Art Frederick,  
VINP Superintendent

## • TIDINGS NOTES •

### A Fond Farewell

VINP's superintendent Art Frederick will be leaving his position at the Park for the National Park Service's Southeast Regional Office in Atlanta. It was only three short years ago that Art arrived on St. John as the Park's new superintendent, and we began to forge our relationship together. We at the Friends have enjoyed a positive, productive, and meaningful relationship with Art, and the announcement of his departure saddened us. However, we share in Art's excitement at such a distinctive promotion to Assistant Deputy Director of the Southeast Region, and wish him all the best in his new position. The good news is that Art will continue to be in contact, as VINP is under the direction of the Southeast Regional Office, and his duties will bring him back to our beautiful Park on occasion.

### V.I. Coastweeks

During 2006 V.I. Coastweeks, organizations, schools, businesses, and groups of dedicated individuals flocked to our territory's beaches, removing marine debris from over 20 beaches and trails on St. John alone. Coastweeks is an organized local effort that is part of the Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup (ICC), which takes place over the course of three weeks beginning September 16th. Debris is removed from our beaches and coastal shores in a concerted effort to protect marine species and habitats, and collect valuable information on the amount and type of debris that can be found along our shores.

According to the territory's 2005 ICC report, over 99 volunteers participated in the removal of 1,172 pounds of debris from 15 of St. John's beaches. Territory wide, 674 volunteers collected over 5 tons of trash from 42 beaches. The most common item found for all three islands were plastic beverage bottles, with a total of 4,444 bottles.

It's never too late to celebrate Coastweeks! You can pitch in by adopting a beach of your own to clean throughout the year. To find out more about the Friends' Adopt-A-Beach/Trail Program please contact Kristen at the Friends, 779-4940.

### Farewell to Friends' Summer Intern

Summer has come to a close, and so, sadly we must say goodbye to Friends' summer intern, Audrey Penn. Audrey was a tremendous asset

to us here at the Friends' office. Her bubbly personality and willingness to help with any task will be greatly missed. Projects and events she contributed to include: 2006 Beach-to-Beach Power Swim, Boater Outreach Education Project, SCA Summer Trail Crew Program, membership and administrative tasks, and in particular Summer Eco-Camps at VIERS. Audrey served as a camp counselor at this summer's Eco-Camps, and her enthusiasm and natural ability with children proved invaluable.

Although Audrey has left us, she is not far. She is now employed by Concordia Eco-Resort as a bookkeeper. All of us at Friends wish her all the best, and thank her for her hard work.

### Volunteers needed

Help the Park and the Friends preserve St. John's natural and cultural resources by becoming a volunteer today! Through hands-on work, you'll learn new skills, share your knowledge with others, and gain a better understanding and appreciation for the Park and our community. Each year, Friends' volunteers contribute hundreds of hours to the Park. Interested in getting involved? Here are some ways in which you can help:

- **Become an Annaberg Docent** and provide tours of the Annaberg Plantation Ruins, a site rich in historical and cultural significance.
- **Become a Naturalist Docent** and help the Park offer new interpretive natural history and ecology tours to visitors.
- **Join REEF Fish Counts** and identify and record fish populations and diversity in National Park waters using a REEF fish identification kit.
- **Record archaeology data** of important historical artifacts at the National Park archaeology laboratory.
- **Be a Front Desk Assistant** at the National Park Visitor Center. Welcome visitors, answer questions, and help sell books and gifts.
- **Help out in the Friend's Office** with the various administrative tasks, events, and programs that require assistance throughout the year.
- **Help with Sky Watch** and become a park ranger's assistant as he/she gives a tour of the night sky.



Photo courtesy of Erinn Muller

## Coral Reef Crisis

Coral reefs in Virgin Islands National Park and around the world are in jeopardy, facing more sources of threat of damage than ever before. In 2005, a significant increase in sea temperatures led to unprecedented bleaching of corals in the Eastern Caribbean, including the Virgin Islands. Coral bleaching occurs when environmental stress (for example, this historically warm seawater temperature) causes corals to expel the symbiotic algae (zooxanthellae) that live inside their tissue, thus leaving the tissue transparent and the coral appearing bleached. In response to this extensive and alarming bleaching episode, scientists at the National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) increased monitoring efforts.

The episodic monitoring, spear-headed by Jeff Miller of the NPS South Florida/Caribbean Inventory and Monitoring program (NPS-SFCN) and Erinn Muller of the USGS, recorded an average of 90% of coral bleached at six long-term monitoring sites in V.I. National Park on St. John and Buck Island Reef National Monument on St. Croix.

Soon after the bleaching episode many corals began to recover. Unfortunately, this recovery period did not last long, as numerous corals (primarily the major reef building corals, such as brain and star corals) were affected by a severe outbreak of coral disease. The average coral loss at the six sites monitored by NPS-SFCN, was a staggering 48.7%. At both the Tektite Reef and Newfound Bay sites coral mortality due to disease was over 50%. According to Jeff Miller "the distressing news it's not over; 50% loss may not be where this ends."

During this same period, scientists from U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), University of the Virgin Islands, and NPS monitored over 460 elkhorn coral colonies at four reefs within V.I. National Park on St. John. Of those 460 colonies, 45% bleached, 13% died partially, and 8% died completely. "The situation is sad; last September was the first time we have seen elkhorn corals bleach. In May, elkhorn coral was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, the first coral that has ever been listed. Fortunately, many elkhorn corals within Virgin Islands National Park appear to be in good shape now. But they are in very shallow water where they often get hit by boats or broken by careless snorkelers," said Dr. Caroline Rogers of USGS.

To many Virgin Islanders last fall's bleaching and disease outbreak served as a serious wakeup call to the crisis affecting our coral reefs. While we cannot control environmental stresses to coral reefs, such as the rise in sea temperatures, there are other ways to help. When boating, help protect coral by using the mooring system. If you must anchor, make sure anchors and anchor chains do not land on coral or seagrass beds. If you are unsure of what lies below, get in

the water with a mask to determine if it is a safe location to anchor. For more information on coral reefs and V.I. anchoring and mooring regulations visit Friends' Boater Education Outreach at <http://www.friendsvinp.org/boat.htm>.

Other simple ways you can help protect our fragile coral reefs: understand that coral reefs are slow-growing and living, never touch coral and make sure others do the same, do not collect coral or shells, and don't litter. Scientists are looking for answers to coral disease, but in the meantime it is important that we do our part to help protect the precious healthy coral that still remains.

## 2006 Summer Eco-Camps


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take home upon completion of the program.

Volunteers, researchers, gemologists, local botanists, and park rangers worked with students to cultivate their interest in native plants, animals, minerals, and eco-systems. The location of VIERS is key in this endeavor, as the camp is located within VINP and is in close proximity to pristine beaches, coral reefs, historical ruins, hiking trails, a salt pond, semi-tropical forests, and a large mangrove stand. Away from home, electronics, and other distractions, VIERS' remoteness ensures that the students are totally submersed in nature.

This was the seventh summer Friends has partnered with VIERS and UVI to sponsor Summer Eco-Camps for V.I. students. With generous funding from our donors: Lana Vento Charitable Trust, Disney, Prosser ICC Foundation, First Bank, Globalvest Management, Rotary Club of St. John, and Dept. of Agriculture, we sent a record number of students to camp. Friends is proud to continue creating a positive environmental summer experience for Virgin Islands' youth.

# Living Art



...the spectacular photographic essay of St. John, is the perfect gift from, or to, those who love St. John and Virgin Islands National Park. This 200-page coffee table book (now with improved readability), by renowned St. John photographer Steve Simonsen, celebrates the natural beauty of St. John in 182 stunning photographs.


A PORTION OF THE PROCEEDS FROM THE SALE OF ALL BOOKS BENEFITS THE VI NATIONAL PARK AND HELPS TO PRESERVE THE SAME NATURAL BEAUTY THE BOOK CELEBRATES. PLEASE CALL, COME BY THE FRIENDS OFFICE, OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR ORDERING INFORMATION.

## WILL POWER

Bequests are a critical source of support for Friends of Virgin Islands National Park.

Please remember the Friends in your estate.

Discuss this with your estate planning advisor or call us for more information, (340) 779-4940.



## Upcoming Friends Events!

Mark your calendars & plan to attend the upcoming Friend's events:

### Celebrate 50 Years of Virgin Islands National Park

On December 1, 1956, before a crowd of 900 people in Cruz Bay, Laurance S. Rockefeller and U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Fred Seaton, signed documents that created Virgin Islands National Park, our nation's 29th National Park.

On December 1, 2006 we will celebrate VI National Park's 50th anniversary in similar fashion with a Commemorative Day celebration at the National Park ball field in Cruz Bay. This event is free and open to the public. The day's festivities will begin at 10:00 a.m. and include a BBQ, live music, a ribbon cutting ceremony at the new philanthropy exhibit and garden in front of the Visitor's Center, a dedication of a new NPS boat called "In the Line of Duty," and the premiere of "The Establishment of Virgin Islands National Park... the way it was", a video produced by Steven Simonsen, Bill Stelzer, and Bruce Schoonover, which features never before seen pictures and movie footage, letters and other interesting facts about VI National Park. Please join us!



Please join us in celebrating the  
**50th Anniversary**  
of the  
**Virgin Islands National Park**  
*dinner, dancing and more*

Turtle Bay Estate House at Caneel Bay Resort

**December 1, 2006**  
**Save the Date!**

For more information about the event contact  
Karen Brady at 340.779.4940 or [kbrady@friendsvinp.org](mailto:kbrady@friendsvinp.org)

## President's Message By Joe Kessler



The news that the bulk of Estate Maho Bay will be preserved should make anyone who loves St. John and VINP jump for joy, give a big sigh of relief, and offer many words of gratitude. The Friends is very pleased to have been a part of this effort, and proud of this significant contribution toward the integrity of Virgin Islands National Park and the preservation of its natural and cultural resources.

The Friends played an important support role in saving Maho Bay by keeping the community and Friends members informed of the plans for Maho Bay.

The email and letter writing campaign that we organized resulted in more than 500 messages sent to the Director of the NPS. This helped reinforce the NPS's opposition to Simons' egregious plans to move the road, drain the wetland, and build a dock. Our letters and Op-Ed pieces in local publications and dialogues with local organizations helped foster informed opposition to the plans. It is safe to assume that these were all factors in Simon's decision not to pursue the purchase of Estate Maho Bay and, in turn opened the door for TPL to resume discussions with the heirs.

Saving Estate Maho Bay is the most momentous preservation effort on St. John – private or public – since Laurence Rockefeller donated the land to establish VI National Park in 1956. We will celebrate and honor the accomplishment of preserving Maho Bay during the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Park Dec 1st.

The Friends and all those who love St. John and VINP owe a debt of gratitude to those who contributed to preserving this magnificent landscape. We offer our heartfelt thanks to TPL (especially former Friends president John Garrison) for making our hopes of conservation a reality, to the (anonymous) foundation for their generosity in financing the acquisition of this land, and to the heirs for their commitment to the preservation of Estate Maho Bay. The impact of this tremendous achievement will be felt for generations to come.

Lastly, we are also very grateful to you, Friends members, for your moral and financial support, and volunteer efforts. Your support keeps this organization vibrant and capable of helping to preserve and protect this wonderful national park. I hope that you will continue to keep VI National Park and the Friends as one of your philanthropic priorities.

Friends of   
**VIRGIN ISLANDS  
NATIONAL PARK**

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