

# Business Monday



## New Cruz Bay restaurant represents a rebirth for longtime island chef

By **ANDREA MILAM**  
Special to The Daily New

Two days after Irma raged through the territory, longtime St. John resident Mathayom Vacharat made it to Windy Level, the Grunwald property that served as home base for his catering business, St. John Catering.

Just three years prior, he'd transformed the space from a plain, basic structure to a charming event venue with indoor and outdoor seating, a fully equipped kitchen, and a garden where he and his team grew herbs, greens, fruits and vegetables they incorporated into their dishes. Vacharat had been hosting successful themed full moon dinners at the venue, and there were several special events on Windy Level's calendar for 2017-2018, projected to be the best season yet for the catering business.

Immediately after the storm, Vacharat heard rumors of Windy Level's dismal fate, but he had to see it with his own two eyes. Sure enough, as he approached the property, he was faced with the reality that



Photo by ANDREA MILAM

Holly Chipman, left, who helped design the Lucky Chops bar menu, Mathayom Vacharat, owner of St. John Catering and Lucky Chops Lounge and head chef Jordan Palmer prepare for their soft opening, which was held last week.

the years of dedication and hard work he'd spent building up his business and the Windy Level venue had been swept away in one terrifying day. He  
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## New medical facility planned on St. Croix

Liberty Medical Development, LLC, has announced the successful closing on construction financing for development of its ambulatory surgical center facilities at Estate Diamond, St. Croix.

When completed, the project will comprise multiple state of the art operating rooms, surgical procedure rooms, and medical clinic offices for several local medical practices,

including practices specializing in orthopedics, obstetrics and gynecology, general surgery, cardiology, oral surgery, and dentistry.

The project will provide a minimum of 14 full time employee positions.

Total capital funding for the project is in excess of \$5 million, of which more than \$1.25 million has already been invested.

Completion of the facilities is

expected to take approximately 8 months, with a planned opening of early 2019.

The project is led by Dr. Brian Bacot of Comprehensive Orthopedics, PLLC. Participating physicians include Dr. Anne Treasure, Dr. Byron Biscoe, Dr. Duane Jones, Dr. Renee Georges, Dr. Jeffrey Chase, Dr. Horace Griffith, and Dr. Alexander Lenard.

## Why I love my job

### Vernon Araujo is chief 'friendraiser' for the Family Resource Center

The ladies love Vernon Araujo. The only male working with the Family Resource Center, the non-profit St. Thomas organization addressing domestic abuse, Araujo's efforts as Director of Development help keep the doors open for this vital community service.

Born in Antigua, Araujo grew up on St. Thomas, graduating from Antilles School in 2002. After college in Boston, he moved back to the island. While soliciting for the Humanities Council, a board member began recruiting him for the Family Resource Center. Araujo joined the team when he learned about the organization, its role in the community and what its needs were, realizing he could help and that the job would be fulfilling in many ways.

As Development Director, Araujo is tasked with fundraising and "friend-

raising," organizing events and campaigns to raise money to keep the center operational. He has been with Family Resource Center for seven years now.

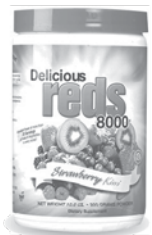
"I love my job for a few reasons. I am an advocate for the cause, but the number one reason is the staff," Araujo said. "It is the most amazing staff I've ever worked with. They are very dedicated and motivated beyond the scope of words. They inspire everyone they come in contact with, including myself. The women that I work with are like Amazonian women. They are going above and beyond every day. My job is easy compared to what they do and the kind of trauma they see and deal with on a daily basis I'm very happy to do what I do while making sure they can do what they do."

—Lori Abbotts



Vernon Araujo

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## CHOPS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

would later learn that his home was completely destroyed as well.

Vacharat is no stranger to the destruction hurricanes can bring. He arrived on island from Philadelphia in 1995, the day before Hurricane Marilyn would ravage the territory. As normalcy returned following that storm, Vacharat began working in the kitchens of various St. John restaurants, including Cafe Roma, Asolare, Chateau Bordeaux, and others. His son was born in 2003, and a desire to spend more time with his family coupled with interest from visitors who wanted him to cater private villa dinners led to Vacharat's departure from the island restaurant scene.

"I was doing a little catering on the side and it started blossoming," he said. "In 2004, I quit my job and began doing catering full time."

St. John Catering quickly flourished, and Vacharat built a business that stayed busy year-round, crafting delicious meals for weddings, private dinners, and major events, delivering gourmet meals to go, and renting equipment. For 10 years, Vacharat's catering operation was based out of his home. The 2014



Photo by ST. JOHN CATERING

Windy Level, home base for chef Mathayom Vacharat's St. John Catering business, was completely destroyed during Hurricane Irma.

development of the Windy Level space represented a major milestone for Vacharat, who was thrilled

to finally have a venue for the business he had built over the course of a decade.

"I put a lot of heart into that space," he said. "I had this vision of a mini event venue. That was our goal."

Like so many others on St. John, Vacharat was faced with the loss of his business, the loss of his home, and little to no income immediately after Irma.

"It never crossed my mind to quit St. John," he said. "I knew that an answer would present itself."

Vacharat was asked to clear what was left of his catering equipment out of the Windy Level property by the end of 2017, giving him the kick he needed to figure out his next step. And sure enough, opportunity presented itself at the location of the former Fish Trap restaurant, a Cruz Bay institution that closed down just prior to Hurricane Irma.

"I was passing by the Fish Trap and I noticed that the Freshwater Church was there doing meals for the community, and I thought, 'Hey, I know the owners of that space; let me reach out to them,'" Vacharat recalled.

Plans quickly fell into place for the chef's next venture, dubbed Lucky Chops Lounge, where Vacharat and his team plan to offer traditional Asian food, creative

mocktails and cocktails, and a venue for live music. With the exception of specials and fresh local seafood dishes, no meal is priced above \$25. The entire space has been completely revamped with new furniture and finishes, resulting in a cozy, inviting atmosphere. Vacharat's catering business will run simultaneously out of the space. Though he never imagined himself back in the restaurant business, Vacharat says he's excited for this new opportunity.

"I have mixed feelings about it," he said. "You get that thrill, that rush, when a service happens, so I'm excited about that. I'm excited about the potential for a second business. It'll help us pay the rent and put some people to work."

Despite admitting to mixed feelings, Vacharat's enthusiasm for his new venture is unmistakable.

"It's a well-designed menu," he said. "I wanted to create a place where I would want to go, somewhere that's different than anywhere else on the island. Our team is so solid, and I can't say enough about how much I appreciate them."

Lucky Chops Lounge hosted a soft opening on Thursday evening and after Memorial Day weekend, will be open Tuesday through Saturday, with the bar opening from 3 to 11 p.m. and food served from 4:30 to 9 p.m. Find Lucky Chops Lounge on Facebook for more information.



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## Back in business

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- **NEW:** Chicken & Bowling: Al Cohen Mall, St. Thomas
- **NEW:** Eumoshu' Hair Boutique Mosha's Hair Bar: King Street, Christiansted, St. Croix
- **NEW:** Leatherback Brewing Company: William Roebuck Industrial Park, St. Croix
- **New location:** Island Empire, Crosswinds Plaza, St. Thomas
- **Kentucky Fried Chicken:** Fort Mylner, St. Thomas
- **NEW:** Azul Cafe: Al Cohen Mall, St. Thomas
- **Thrive Chiropractic:** Royal Palm Professional Building, St. Thomas
- **NEW:** Lucky Chops, Cruz Bay, St. John.