



Love City Livin'

Post-storm response inspires deep friendships

By **ANDREA MILAM**
St. John Correspondent

ST. JOHN — As Irma thundered across St. John, those who had visited the island previously and fallen in love with its natural beauty and its people watched anxiously, waiting for news of their special home away from home.

Many of those people wanted to help in some way, sending financial donations to nonprofits geared toward recovery, or packaging up supplies to help island residents who lost their homes or belongings.

“After the hurricanes, I spent every day following the situation online in various Facebook groups, worrying for the island we love and the people finding themselves in such a dire situation,” said Tricia Patricco. “We quickly volunteered via Adopt a Family USVI and sent several boxes of emergency supplies to families on St. Thomas and St. John. We donated money where we could to help people mobilizing larger efforts, and as much as we knew it was helping actual people in a tangible way, there was no personal connection to the effort.”

When frequent visitor Susan Marone discovered that Anna May Charrington, whose condo she usually rents on her St. John vacations, would be making a post-storm trip to the island to check on her Grande Bay unit, Marone had an idea.

“I told her about how I wanted to start something for St. John’s kids, and I asked if she could be my eyes and ears on the island,” Marone said.

Marone put together a simple intake form, asking about specific needs, favorite colors, and clothing sizes, and Charrington delivered the forms to the island’s schools and the Our Lady of



Tricia and Anthony Patricco, back row left, with their match’s family, David and Jessica Obando, back row right, and front row, Nissi Obando, Anthony Patricco, and Adelis and Isaias Obando at Maho Bay beach.

Mt. Carmel Catholic Church. Charrington texted photos of the completed forms to Marone, who was at home re-

covering from surgery.

“I started getting a steady flow of phone calls, forms were being emailed

to me, and it just took off from there,” said Marone. “I was spending up to 10 hours a day matching families on the



Anthony and Tricia Patricco with their son Anthony in St. John Strong T-shirts.

weekends. I just really threw myself into it. By late October it fully caught fire; that’s when the boxes started to flow.”

The group was dubbed St. John Kids, and Marone started a Facebook group where she could post the genders and ages of specific kids on island, allowing volunteers to match with specific children or families. The idea of forming relationships with families on island appealed to those looking for a tangible way to help.

“I made financial contributions to several organizations, asked my friends to support the island, and went to fundraisers,” said Cynthia Nizzari. “It just wasn’t enough. I could never afford a contribution that would make a real difference, so when I heard about St. John Kids, I jumped at the opportunity. It has changed my life. I have a connection with two beautiful children and their families, which certainly deepened my connection to the island.”

Aside from the measurable benefits

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Love City happenings

Love City Pan Dragons to resume practice Friday

The Love City Pan Dragons will begin practice for the 2018-2019 season at 3:30 p.m. Friday at the pan yard in Cruz Bay. Anyone interested in joining can pick up a registration form ahead of time from the Sports, Parks and Recreation building, and you're welcome to come and watch the first practice to see if the band might be a good fit for you. Ages eight and up are welcome, and no previous experience is necessary. For more information, email pandragons@unitedstates.vi.

Fun day, school supply giveaway set for Aug. 25

Two hundred backpacks and school supplies will be distributed to St. John children from 2 to 5 p.m. Aug. 25 at the Frank Powell Park in Cruz Bay. Sponsored by the Dynamic Dancers, St. John Community Foundation, Rotary Club of St. John, and the St. John Youth Organization, all St. John children and families are welcome to enjoy free burgers and hot dogs. There also will be a cotton candy machine, bouncy house, face painting, and other fun kid-friendly activities.

Love City Rise Up! CD release party Sept. 6

The public is invited to attend the Love City Rise Up! CD release party from 7:30 to 9 p.m. Sept. 6 at High Tide.

Come mingle with the artists, who will be on hand to share their experiences making the song, which is a heartfelt tribute to St. John and its people's resiliency. All proceeds from sale of the song, written by frequent visitor Dean Doeling, will be donated to nonprofit organizations on St. John that have helped in the hurricane recovery effort. CDs will be for sale at the party, or can be pre-ordered at <https://lovecityriseup.bigcartel.com/products>.

Sewer is an enthusiastic presence, familiar face at Sprauve library

By **ANDREA MILAM**
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ST. JOHN — As anyone who's been to the Elaine I. Sprauve Public Library in the past few months can attest, to walk into the library is to be greeted warmly with a big smile by Carla Sewer, St. John's new librarian.

Though Sewer may be new to the Cruz Bay library, her face is a familiar one on-island. The daughter of Calis and Gloria Sewer, she's engaged with numerous families and children on St. John throughout her career.

Born on St. Thomas and raised on St. John, Sewer graduated from Julius E. Sprauve School and Ivanna Eudora Kean High School. She earned an associate degree in child development, then a bachelor's in education before starting up a children's library at the Coral Bay Agriculture Station, where families could take advantage of the books and computers that were donated at Sewer's request. She also ran a pay-what-you-can summer camp there.

"We tied the camp to agriculture and planning, and read books about growing food," Sewer recalled. "I wasn't making money but I was engaging in my passion."

Sewer went on to teach at her alma mater, Julius E. Sprauve School, for two years, before earning a master's degree in family studies, and she's currently studying to earn a PhD in family studies while concurrently working toward a second master's in library sciences and teaching an online class in parent-child relations.

"I love school," said Sewer. "I love being a student and I love learning. The library sciences degree is really connecting with my PhD in terms of research — how does a librarian help other researchers find materials they need to support their papers? Being a librarian is a plus for me because I'm learning how to delve deep into finding what I need."

Sewer has long been interested in the way parents engage their children



Carla Sewer is the new librarian at the Elaine I. Sprauve Public Library, but already a very familiar face on St. John, where she has long been involved in community programs.

Daily News photo by ANDREA MILAM

in learning, and she's excited to implement some of her knowledge at the library.

"I see children and families as being engaged in learning through community spaces, and one of those spaces is the public library," she said. "I'm connecting family studies with library science. The family is a child's primary socializing agent, and institutions, particularly public libraries, share in that process."

Sewer said she's not looking to reinvent the wheel when it comes to programs she hopes the library will offer, but she does want to expand upon what's been successful in the past. She wants to reintroduce story

time, cupcake decorating classes, and the knitting club that's long met weekly at the library, as well as implement some new initiatives like basic computer skill classes and grant writing workshops. The library doubles as a cultural museum, and Sewer hopes to expand on cultural activities like basket-making workshops and woodworking presentations.

The one thing that's currently holding Sewer back from being able to implement these programs is air conditioning. In the wake of Hurricane Irma, there's only one air conditioning unit to cool the whole library, which is woefully inadequate.

"I hope that as a community we

can come together to save and support community spaces, so it's important to see the public library as a vital community space for children, families, locals, and visitors alike," said Sewer.

The library is also in need of exterior landscaping, where Sewer hopes to have benches for people to read outside in the shade, and an IT person to fix up the computer lab, which gets a lot of use from students who come there in the afternoons to do schoolwork.

Sewer said she welcomes community feedback and invites the public to meet with her at the library from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, or call her at **340-776-6359**.

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96 degrees in the shade

A herd of sheep in Coral Bay hide in a small patch of shade Wednesday to escape the early afternoon heat. Scattered showers are expected today as a tropical wave moves through the region, with temperatures expected around 89 degrees, though it may feel hotter with the heat index.

Daily News photo by
ANDREA MILAM



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ST. JOHN KIDS

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like the supplies, clothes, snacks and toys those on island have received, they've also benefited from the relationships formed with their adopters. One single mother and her daughter, who lost their home in the storm and spent the subsequent months bouncing from home to home, stayed with their St. John Kids match during their vacation to the island.

"At the time of our visit, our match's mother was staying with her sister in a tiny apartment and sleeping on an air mattress with her daughter," said Carley Cook. "We were fortunate enough to have five bedrooms and some extra space. We hit it off the first day we met and pretty much spent every day thereafter together. I went back in April and she stayed with me then as well, at Grande Bay. Now she has a home, and my boyfriend and I will be staying with her for a couple days on our next visit."

Marone estimates that more than 200 island children have been matched via the St. John Kids group. Other initiatives have come out of the group, including a shipment of clothes and toiletries to the Catholic Church's homeless program, a financial donation to Giffit Hill School, and a teacher's luncheon for Julius E. Sprauve School staff.

The idea for the recent trip to New Hampshire by island dance group the Dynamic Dancers also began thanks to a connection that started with St.

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— Cynthia Nizzari

John Kids.

"We can't take back what happened there, but we can at least make families smile and make the island's children happy," Marone said.

Marone herself finally got to visit the island in April when she met her match, 12-year-old Audena Pickering.

"We spent a lot of time together," Audena said. "We went to the beach together, and that's when our family really connected with Sue. She has a really special place in our hearts, not for the things she sent but more so for the friendship we have built that will last a lifetime."



Daily News photo by ANDREA MILAM
Tricia Patricco with her island match, 9-year-old Isaias Obando.