



Love City Livin'

Rainbow days



Daily News photo by ANDREA MILAM

A rainbow appears on a recent morning at Trunk Bay. Mostly clear skies and brief passing showers have produced many rainbows across territory skies recently. The remnants of Tropical Storm Kirk could bring gusty winds and rain to the Virgin Islands on Friday.

Friends of V.I. National Park kicks off ambitious plan

By ANDREA MILAM
St. John Correspondent

Heavy hurricane damage, loss of employee housing, reduced staff, and budget cuts mean the Virgin Islands National Park is going to need more help than ever from the nonprofit Friends of VINP.

Between park project requests and signature programs the Friends has supported over the years, the organization is slated to fund — and in some cases oversee or direct — 38 projects during the upcoming fiscal year.

“We had more project support requests from the park than ever before in Joe’s history,” Friends development director Tonia Lovejoy said of the organization’s outgoing president Joe Kessler’s tenure. “We appreciate that they’re relying on us in this time of transition and need.”

The list of Friends projects includes programs they’ve funded for many years, including the Folk Life Festival and the Earth Day Fair, along with wildlife studies including the sea turtle monitoring program, which is currently ongoing, and a bird assessment, which has taken place on the island off and on since 1987.

Repairs to hurricane-damaged structures within the park also make up several items on the list, including repairing the Annaberg cookhouse and gardener shed, and replacing the



Photo by YELENA ROGERS

Ranger Laurel Brannick leads a summer camp seashore walk this past summer. The event was funded by the Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park.

Maho Bay pavilions, which were lost to Irma. “Managing projects is a large part of what the Friends does,” said Lovejoy. “We have the ability to execute and deliver quicker than the federal government, and we can source local contractors and materials to the best of our ability.”

Another repair project the VINP asked the Friends to fund is fixing the Cruz Bay playground’s fence at a cost of \$1,800, but Lovejoy hopes to raise enough money for an overhaul of the playground itself, which suffered damage during Hurricane Irma.

“If we raise \$10,000, it would inspire the

design and give us a sense of what could be possible,” she said.

Some Friends programs are funded in part by larger donations that are pledged toward specific efforts, while money for others comes from member dues and annual fund efforts. Other projects will rely on donations from the community or those off-island who wish to support the Friends. Cultural programs is one area Lovejoy said she wants to focus on.

“National parks struggle nationwide with balancing their investment in cultural resources and protection of the natural environment, and in lean times it’s easy for the government to drop off on the cultural aspect,” she said. “Culture is one of the major assets of the park on St. John, and to keep a culture alive, you have to understand it. I hope that in a small way, our cultural programs try to keep that link.”

Many of the Friends’ programs are detailed on their website, and community feedback is welcome on the nonprofit’s projects, Lovejoy said.

“I’m hoping to pull back a layer of mystique about how the Friends does projects, and really give people the opportunity to get engaged and give feedback, with the understanding that we are friends of the park,” she said. “We work in partnership with them.”

Donations to the Friends’ upcoming projects, including the Cruz Bay playground renovation, can be made at www.friendsvinp.org.

St. John Ice not giving up despite post-Irma hardships

By **ANDREA MILAM**
St. John Correspondent

St. John Ice owner Alan Johnson isn't going to let tough times freeze him out of business, but he's going to need some help to get back on his feet. Johnson and his business have faced one difficulty after another since Irma hit the island. The ice and water he provided to residents in the days after the storm came at a cost.

"We kept the business running at a loss because of the amount of diesel we needed to keep the generator running," Johnson said. "I felt it was important to keep everything going, to keep as many people employed as I could. I ran my generator 24/7 for five months."

St. John Ice has been located in the Lumberyard since 1992, but the Cruz Bay shopping complex was slated for demolition after Irma heavily damaged the buildings. Johnson was allowed to continue running his business there until Aug. 6, when the demolition contractor told him it was time to go.

The Lumberyard's owner, Legacy Development, promised Johnson he would be able to move his business back in, but nearly two months later, he's whittled his business down, operating off the Lumberyard premises in an effort to keep supplying ice and water for the island's construction crews.

"The fact of the matter is, on the two days after I moved out of the Lumberyard and wasn't up and running, the contractors had to give their guys money to go to the grocery stores to buy ice and water," Johnson said.

Prior to the storm, St. John Ice supplied bagged ice to nearly every grocery store on the island, and they refilled drinking water jugs for residents. The business is well-known for its willingness to donate ice to events hosted by the Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park, the St. John Animal Care Center, and the Love City Pan Dragons, and they've supplied water for free



Daily News photo by ANDREA MILAM

St. John Ice owner Alan Johnson, center, with employees Kyle Daniel and Dale Brathwaite.

to EMS crews and the Julius E. Sprauve School. Johnson makes an effort to hire local young adults, and speaks fondly of seeing his former

employees rise up the ranks.

"I get a lot of satisfaction when they come back to visit and tell me how they're working as

a refrigeration mechanic, or a Toyota mechanic," Johnson said. "I do believe businesses need to be more community minded."

Johnson, who grew up on St. Thomas, admits that running an ice and water business is not where he imagined life would take him. In the mid-70s, after sailing down island, he decided to move to St. John, where he worked at the Caneel Bay Resort and built boats as a hobby. In an attempt to help out his brother, who was heading down the wrong path at the time, Johnson connected his brother with one of his friends, and together the duo built an ice machine. St. John Ice opened in 1983 under the old Fish Trap restaurant. Johnson's desire to help, which could be credited as the inspiration behind St. John Ice, has been a hallmark of the business over the decades.

"He is one of our most consistently involved and supportive businesses," said longtime resident Bonny Corbeil. "His donations to island fundraisers require hard labor, work, cost, and manpower, yet Alan has always responded with, 'Yes, I'll help.' His commitment to this community has gone on for decades."

Facing a financial crunch and with a long road ahead of him to get the business reestablished in the Lumberyard, Johnson will need financial help to get St. John Ice back up and running at its prior level. When moving out of the Lumberyard, he realized just how old some of his equipment was, and he's hoping to invest in a stronger infrastructure.

"I'm hoping to get some interest-free loans or even donations," Johnson said. "New equipment is not cheap, but I want to create a really good infrastructure for St. John, because when the ports shut down after a hurricane, we're truly an island. If we can't produce our own ice and water locally, we're in trouble. I guess I just refuse to give up."

Johnson is in the process of setting up a fundraising outlet to receive donations. Those interested in helping can reach him at stjohniceco@gmail.com.

Love City Happenings

International Coastal Cleanup events Friday, Saturday

The Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park is hosting a beach cleanup at Drunk Bay on Friday at 8 a.m. The cleanup is being held in honor of the Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup.

Volunteers are asked to meet at 8 a.m. at the Salt Pond parking lot with water,

sun-protective clothing, sturdy shoes, and hat. The Friends will provide gloves, bags, and tally sheets to record trash collected. Residents can also adopt their own beach as part of the cleanup effort.

For more information, contact Karen Jarvis at kjarvis@friendsvinp.org or call **340-779-4940**.

The V.I. National Park will host an International Coastal Cleanup event at Princess Bay on Saturday from

11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Experienced snorkelers are invited to take part in this underwater cleanup to help restore the beauty of Hurricane Hole while checking out the recovering marine life. Several small debris items remain in the bay after the removal of hurricane-damaged boats.

Friends of VINP will provide transportation to this cleanup from the Cruz Bay Visitor Center to Prin-

cess Bay and back for up to 15 people. Those participating should bring water, snacks, snorkel gear, and a mesh bag for collecting debris. Call **340-776-6201** ext. **238** to sign up.

Free cistern water testing for Coral Bay residents

Coral Bay residents are invited to have their cistern water tested for bacteria above the EPA drinking wa-

ter standard. The cost is \$10 courtesy of a grant program sponsored by Rotary Club of St. Thomas II.

Residents should pick up a sterilized container at the Coral Bay Community Council office no later than Oct. 5, and drop the water sample back at the office on Oct. 8 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. For more information, email water@coralbaycommunitycouncil.org.

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