

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Thomas Sailing Center's Open House Sparks Enthusiasm Among Virgin Islanders

St. Thomas Yacht Club's open house invites locals to discover the thrill of sailing

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ST. THOMAS — On Sunday afternoon, the waters of Cowpet Bay hosted curious Virgin Islanders eager to learn more about the sport of sailing. Welcomed to the Saint Thomas Sailing Center by the island's yacht club, Consortium team member Bria James was one of the many who made the trek out east.

While out on the water, she spoke to her skipper Dennis Nixon about why he loved sailing so much. "You're so completely in touch with nature; you're responding to waves,

you're responding to wind...you are moving in a motion that is unlike anything you'll ever be able to feel on land."

Acknowledging that owning and maintaining a boat can be a costly endeavor, Mr. Nixon said that was why the program run by the Sailing Center was so valuable. At a cost of \$1300 per year, one can have access to "really solid, well-maintained boats," so anyone with interest in the sport can learn how to sail without the substantial investment necessary for boat ownership.

Additionally, learning to sail can also bring opportunities to serve as crew on board a vessel, expanding opportunities to experience the joy of sailing absent the attendant cost burdens, Mr. Nixon noted.

Christian Rosenberg, a member of the St. Thomas Yacht Club for almost 60 years, disclosed that Sunday's open house was part of a larger community engagement effort, aimed at opening up more access to sailing for more Virgin Islanders. Other initiatives coming on stream, according to Mr. Rosenberg, include a membership sponsorship program, as well as an initiative that teaches marine skills to young people as an entry point into the profession.

The lifelong sailor credited his introduction to the sport as a 10-year old in an 8-foot Optimus as a significant factor in his life journey. Learning how to race shaped his mindset at a young age, Mr. Rosenberg said. "That competitive spirit really showed me a lot about life...it gave me that fire to excel."

Part of his contribution to the sport was the creation of the IC-24, the boat to which Ms. James and other open house attendees were introduced on Sunday. After Hurricanes Hugo & Marlyn decimated the territory's boat stock, Mr. Rosenberg worked collaboratively with others to develop a design suitable to the unique needs of the Virgin Islands. They agreed on several key characteristics their new vessel would need to have. "We've got to find a boat that's comfortable, that we can use to teach sailing to people of all ages, that is easy to use by people of all ages, and that is economical."

They replaced the uncomfortable cockpit of a J-24 with a mold taken from a different vessel and modified to suit, and thus was born the IC-24, part of the territory's sailing legacy that the St. Thomas Yacht Club wishes to inculcate in younger generations of Virgin Islanders.

In Ms. James, their aims may have succeeded. Following her introduction to sailing, she says that she is eager to learn more about maneuvering through the water. One thing that stuck with her "was observing the genuine enthusiasm and passion of the captain [Mr. Nixon]. It was evident of his deep affection for sailing."