The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Letter To Editor, WICO CEO Says Goodbye And Offers Insights

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Dear Editor,

For the past five years, it has been my honor and pleasure to serve as the CEO and President of the West Indian Company Limited. And as I embark on the next stage of my life and career, I will assuredly miss the professionalism and camaraderie of WICO's hardworking, dedicated staff of 78 employees. Since I came aboard in May of 2012, I have been extremely proud of our accomplishments and transformational achievements.

Even as we faced the storms of a quickly changing cruise industry market and increasingly aggressive competition by other destinations in the region, my dedicated staff and I, under the guidance of our resolute board, worked with two administrations, the legislature, our treasured merchants and business community, the Department of Tourism and the Virgin Islands Port Authority, to ensure the financial stability of a leading cruise port of in the Caribbean.

Our successes included not only overseeing the regular maintenance and upgrades of our port, but doing the long-term planning, financing and securing the necessary permits and approvals from the various local and federal agencies for $25 million capital improvement plan which, once completed, will enable the dock to accommodate even the largest class of the new cruise liners. Additionally, working in collaboration with the Government Employees Retirement System (GERS), the Havensight Mall is undergoing a renovation to create a modern ambiance for shopping and entertainment for our cruise ship passengers and crew, overnight visitors and, of course, our residents. Lastly, our team successfully executed three long-term berthing agreements with our cruise line partners to solidify millions of passenger visits over the next decade.

We have also been successful, in a very competitive region, in marketing the Territory as a viable and attractive destination, while aggressively courting new cruise lines. As the newly reopened and novel destination Cuba develops its cruise industry and as St Martin, the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, the British Virgin Islands make huge investments in their ports and destination offerings, WICO has been developing strategic plans to identify how we can improve our product. These plans will ensure our future for the next several decades while simultaneously increasing number of calls. Additionally, I have been keeping in close communications with our all-important cruise line clients and stepping up our national and trade industry public relations to keep our partners informed of our plans.

WICO’s dock and related facilities are the envy of the region because of our deep-water, naturally protected harbor and it accounts for 70% of the passengers that come to the Territory’s shores. Last year, our premier port helped bring in $344 million into our economy according to the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association. WICO is a major economic engine for the Virgin Island economy.

As cruise passengers continue to refine their ever-changing vacation preferences, management at various destinations and cruise companies must continue to observe the evolving needs of their customers and create offerings that attract vacationers while earning a reasonable return. Overall, the cruise industry is growing and the Caribbean region is the largest segment of the market. Because the region represents the largest market, the newest, most massive and exciting ships sail in these waters. So, destinations that invest in new product offerings and are good stewards of their ports, have a promising future.

Our Virgin Islands remain a marquee destination featuring eye-catching beaches and vistas, renowned shopping and friendly people. As our visitors seek vacation memories, our public and private sector partners must continue to collaborate and provide an island Eden filled with exciting shore attractions and experiences in a safe and clean environment. Every happy visitor becomes a new friend. Every new friend hopefully comes back to our shores bring more family members to relive memories again and again.

So, as I muster my trusted WICO crew and turn over this ship to a new captain, I am confident that our 105-year-old company will keep it’s true bearing of stability and prosperity. I wish everyone at WICO fair winds and calm seas.