

## After Over 22 Years, New Molasses Pier on St. Croix's South Shore Breaks Ground, and as a Result Gallows Bay is Poised for Economic Renaissance, Port Authority Says

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ST. CROIX — It was roughly 22 years ago that Senator Alicia Hansen moved legislation to name a facility that would one day be the hub for cargo operations on St. Croix after Gordon A. Finch, a former V.I. Port Authority director praised for his leadership. More than 22 years later, under the leadership of VIPA Executive Director Carlton Dowe, a commencement ceremony was held at the Krause Lagoon near the Container Port on July 21, where work for the project is well underway.

At its completion, the \$24 million project will see all cargo operations move from Gallows Bay to the Molasses Pier. The project is funded in part through a \$10.6 million BUILD Grant (Better

Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development Grant) from the U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration (formerly the TIGER, or Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery Grant). Matching funds were appropriated by the V.I. Legislature through a bill sponsored by Senator Alicia Barnes and co-sponsored by Senator Novelle Francis — both of whom were speakers at the July 21 event.

AT Construction LLC was awarded the land-side construction contract through a competitive bidding process, according to the Port Authority.

Port Authority Assistance Executive Director and Director of Engineering, Damian Cartwright, said the project will make room for Gallows Bay to flourish. "This is a monumental project for St. Croix," he proclaimed. Thanking those who preceded the current VIPA leadership on their efforts to move work forward, he added, "I am just extremely excited and humbled to be a part of the VIPA team that is finally able to bring this project to fruition." Mr. Cartwright described the project as "nothing short of transformative," adding, "for the first time the Gallows Bay district of Christiansted will finally be able to realize its full and true potential, which I truly feel will lead to an economic renaissance for the greater downtown of Christiansted."

V.I. Port Authority Exec. Director Carlton Dowe's leadership was praised during the commencement event. "Thanks to the creative, visionary leadership of Executive Director Carlton Dowe, we are finally here today to celebrate a vision come to reality," said Mr. Cartwright.

Former senator and ubiquitous Virgin Islands personality, Alicia Hansen, said Mr. Dowe while in the Senate was described as "the bread and butter" senator, a mover and shaker and someone who gets the job done.

Governor Albert Bryan spoke of the executive director's tenacity as he recalled the naysayers who attempted to dissuade him from hiring Mr. Dowe. Mr. Bryan also highlighted the pier as an example of his administration's vision to move projects forward territory-wide.

For his part, Mr. Dowe sees the success of the Port Authority as a team effort. As has been his custom, the executive director during his speech lauded VIPA staff and highlighted young engineers who the port has employed out of college, providing them with matching salaries of a competitive state. "The Port Authority believes, and I believe strongly, that we must cultivate that next set of young people and engineers. Bring them home... let them make their mistakes, but let's guide them," he said.

Mr. Dowe also brought to light the arduous process that led to eventual success relative to securing federal dollars for the project. He said the port learned of a TIGER grant that could be used to develop the pier. The port then hired a consultant in Florida for \$50,000 to help in securing the grant. "There's nothing wrong in reaching out to people who have either done it before or people who really understand and have the know-how," Mr. Dowe said.

The first attempt to secure the funding was denied. Mr. Dowe had to go back to the VIPA board a second time to secure another \$50,000 for more consulting work in his pursuit of the federal dollars. "We got a little further with the same consultant, [but] to no avail. We lost again," Mr. Dowe said. The executive director, known to be tenacious, did not give up. However going before the VIPA board a third time was not easy. He told the board that the consultant's price had been reduced. The board asked by how much. "I said by \$2,000," he relayed during his speech, eliciting laughs from the audience.

On the third try, the funding was secured.

"If you really want anything to happen it's going to take some bumps, some bruises, some lumps — and sometimes stepping on some toes that might be uncomfortable," Mr. Dowe said. "But we were able with the help of the board and all the players, to have yes being the final answer."

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