

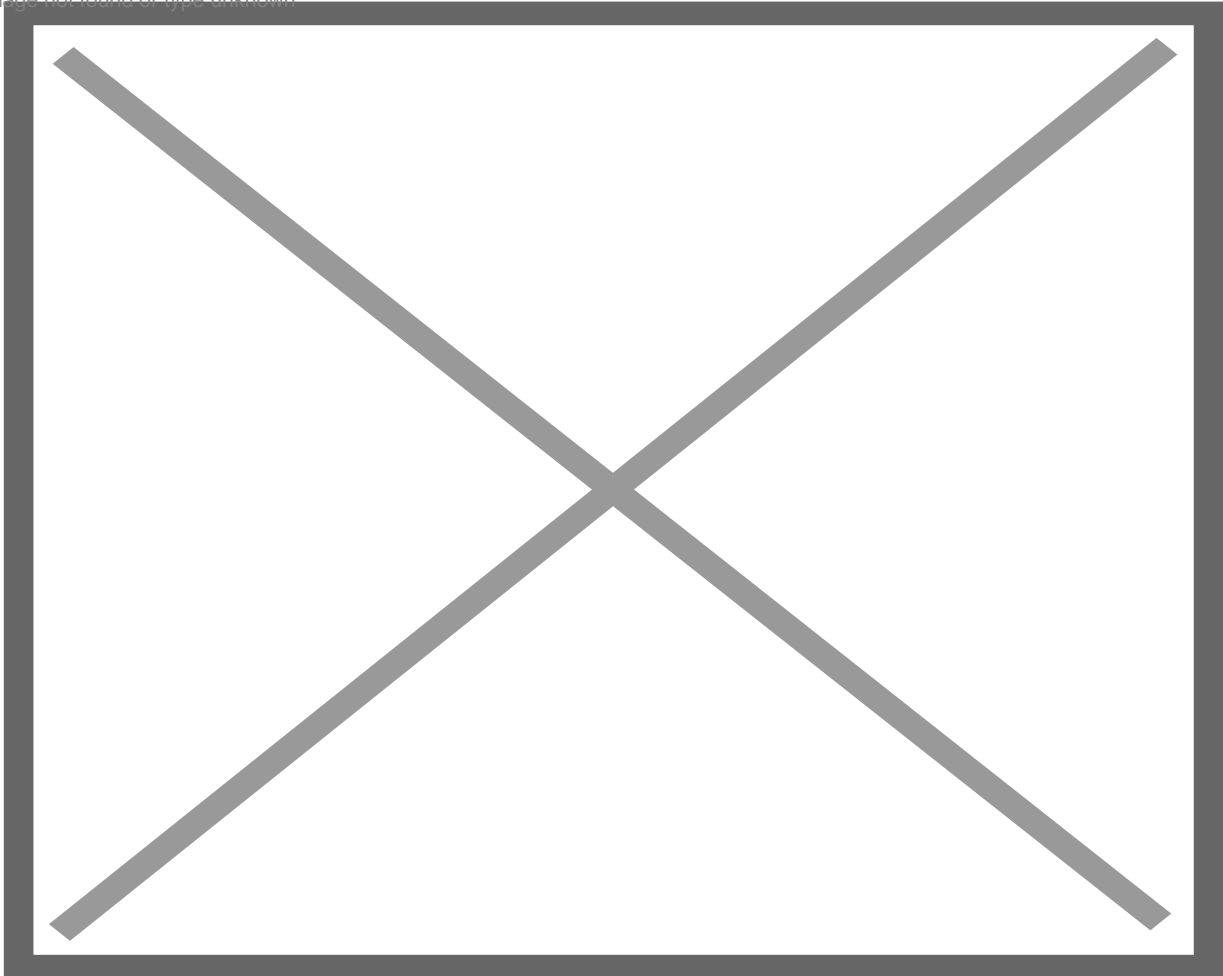
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Luxurious Cruise Ships in Gallows Bay? Hope Runs High at Ribbon Cutting of Project's First Phase

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Lt. Gov. Roach (right) and VIPA Executive Director Dowe (left) hold the scissors. To the left of Mr. Dowe are Sens. Frett-Gregory and Barnes. To the right of Mr. Roach are Mr. Francis and Kevin Rodriguez. By. Cruselda Roberts, VIC

ST. CROIX — V.I. Port Authority Executive Director, Carlton Dowe, is known for taking action. He is also known for amassing into one location movers and shakers of all kinds to get his message — and mission — across. So it was no surprise, then, when almost everybody who is anybody showed up on Friday morning to Mr. Dowe's Gallows Bay Marine Facility ribbon cutting for the first phase of a project that officials expect will transform Gallows Bay into a bustling destination where tourists with deep pockets frequent, after debarking their luxurious, small cruise ships to experience the island.

Mr. Dowe was eager to show attendees the newly built dual-purpose Welcome Center that marked the completion of phase one of the project. But before the ribbon-cutting and tour, he spoke highly of his team at V.I.P.A. that he said makes the work at the authority possible. Mr. Dowe, before being removed by former Governor Kenneth Mapp and then reinstated under the Bryan administration, was known to run a tight ship at the authority and show appreciation to his employees. This was on full display on Friday, as he called employees — among them engineers young and old — to stand. Calling them out one by one, Mr. Dowe heaped praise on the seemingly appreciative team members.

He also thanked lawmakers and the Bryan administration for making the first phase possible. Sitting in the audience were Senators Alicia Barnes, Donna Frett-Gregory, Novelle Francis, Javan James and Stedmann Hodge, Jr. Mr. Francis spoke of the commitment to the project and his desire to see more activity at the Gallows Bay Marine Facility. So too did Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach (acting governor on Friday), who highlighted the beauty of the USVI, which he said its residents sometimes take for granted.

The new visitor center was built by contractor G.E.C. LLC for \$1.5 million, and was funded by through bond financing obtained by the Port Authority in 2014.

The plan, according to Mr. Dowe, is to move all cargo activity currently taking place in Gallows Bay to the Gordon A. Finch Molasses Pier located in the area of the Container Port (Krause Lagoon). This project is expected to last no more than one year and six months, according to Mr. Dowe. Once this occurs, the Schooner Bay Channel at the Gallows Bay Marine Facility will then be dredged to accommodate the small, luxurious cruise ships.

But there's a hurdle standing in the way of phase two. The Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has for years held up approval for dredging the Schooner Bay Channel. Asked about an approval window, Mr. Dowe told the Consortium that USACE said it should be ready sometime in December. This remains to be seen, though, as previous windows given by the Port Authority were not met.

If, however, approval is granted, Gallows Bay could well be on its way to becoming a mecca for commerce. Mr. Dowe told the Consortium that V.I.P.A. intends to lease the visitor center to someone willing to turn it into a location with some nightlife — not just a mundane visitor center.

Following the ribbon-cutting affair, event attendees were given a tour of the new facility. Entertainment from Stanley and the Ten Sleepless Knights marked an evening event to close out the day.

Yet for Mr. Dowe, the work was only beginning. During a recent conversation with the Consortium in St. Thomas, the executive director detailed passionately a number of projects coming online territory-wide with a drive so determined that Mr. Dowe, without pause, spoke in detail about each project and how they would be funded.