

Subject: Media story link to our tree plantings. Thanks for adding!
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ST. THOMAS SOURCE

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Volunteers Plant Dozens of Trees at Smith Bay Park



Rocks were the biggest challenge of the day as more than 35 volunteers planted trees at Smith Bay Park Sunday morning. A University of the Virgin Islands Caribbean Exploratory Research Center grant funded the project, allowing volunteers to plant some 50 trees lining the entrance to the park.

Volunteer Jack Bremer said that it took about 45 minutes to dig each hole using a pickaxe, shovel and water to soften the soil.

“Rocks can be our friends and our enemies,” joked Jason Budsan, president of the Environmental Association of St. Thomas–St. John (EAST) and the Virgin Islands Conservation Society (VICS).

Magens Bay Authority board member Katina Coulianos said that, while rocks make digging difficult, when a large one is taken out of the ground, it leaves an ideal space to plant trees. She noted that the trees were chosen because they are native to the east end of St. Thomas and flourish in weather and land conditions specific to that “zone” of the island.

Coulianos listed a few of the trees volunteers planted, including marble, myrcianthes, black caper, lignum vitae, bay rum and turpentine. She said Gary Ray, associate professor of biology at UVI, and Toni Thomas, extension agent at UVI, helped to choose the trees.

Other volunteers included Ivanna Eudora Kean High School students, EAST and VICS members, representatives from UVI, representatives from several local environmental preservation and protection groups, and more. Planting will continue on Saturday.

Budsan explained that the project began when VICS applied for a \$5,000 UVI grant related to dengue and ciguatera, and climate change. The grant was awarded based on VICS’s efforts to combat the mosquito population with climate solutions, he said.

Coulianos noted that the trees planted produce oils and strong fragrances that help with mosquito control.



Dengue is a virus transmitted through mosquito bites. Ciguatera is a poison contracted from eating fish contaminated with toxins. Both of these, said Budsan, are directly related to effects of climate change.

“It’s all interrelated. One thing starts and spreads and then spreads to another, and it keeps going,” he said.

Climate change ultimately ties in with global warming which is responsible for five million illnesses per year as well as an increase in natural disasters and much more, Budsan said. The more trees planted, the more carbon reduction, he said.



“We’re seeing it right now. Conditions are dry. Problems are lengthening,” he noted. “We have extreme flooding followed by extreme drought. That’s the reason behind why VICS believed in getting these projects going.”

Volunteers are needed Saturday from 7:30 a.m. until finished. Call Jason Budsan for more information at 777-7190 or e-mail eastactivities@gmail.com [1].

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