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St. Croix Avis



USVI

169th YEAR

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A will to survive

The struggle of two patients seeking health care in the VI

SUSAN ELLIS

ST. CROIX — Just two years ago, Liz Tylecki-Kuniej worked with leatherback turtles and hiked up to 10 miles a day — now it takes three or four hours just to get out of bed in the morning.

You're tired all the time. Your body

is fighting your organs," she said.

Kuniej was diagnosed with mixed connective tissue autoimmune disease in 2011. Since then she has learned that medical care and treatment for lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, scleroderma and her other dis-

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In this March 28, 2012, file photo, supporters of health care reform rally in front of the Supreme Court in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. The rally was held to protest the exclusion of certain groups from key components of the Affordable Care Act, including the insurance program for people with pre-existing conditions.

lecture series today in the Danish-Swedish West India Company Warehouse in Christiansted.

Tom Eader

St. Croix Economic Development Institute tackles agriculture production for food, energy

TOM EADER

ST. CROIX — The St. Croix Economic Development Institute focused on agriculture production as a source for food as well as energy during a regular monthly meeting Wednesday evening at Pier 69 in Frederiksted.

In order to tackle the topic of food and energy while discussing the status of agriculture as an industry on St. Croix, Department of Agriculture Commissioner Louis Petersen Jr. served as the keynote speaker and representatives from Tibbar Energy USVI LLC made a presentation. May Adams Cornwall, executive director of the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority, spoke during the meeting as well.

"We want to look at the whole idea of how we spur economic growth," Anthony Weekes, SEDI founder, told the attendees.

While SEDI stands for St. Croix Economic Development Institute, Weekes said it also stands for Strategic Economic Development Institute. He said the monthly meetings are designed to spark dialogue about how to stimulate the economy. Weekes said agriculture is a critical part of any economy. He stressed the importance of sustaining agriculture in the territory as a means of survival.

"The Virgin Islands is one of the only places in the United States where we don't have our own food supply," he said, adding a nation that can't feed itself is asking for trouble.

Petersen said St. Croix is in the midst of an agricultural renaissance.

"We have not begun to develop our potential," he said.

In order to develop the agriculture industry on St. Croix and throughout the Virgin Islands, Petersen stressed the importance of partnerships. One of the partners the Department of Agriculture has teamed up with is the Virgin Islands Housing Authority. Petersen said his department has access to all the water stored in cisterns at the various housing communities



Anthony Weekes, founder of the St. Croix Economic Development Institute, speaks during a monthly meeting Wednesday night at Pier 69 restaurant in Frederiksted.

throughout the territory. He said the total cistern capacity on St. Croix is 38 million gallons, while the capacity on St. Thomas is 12 million gallons.

"This is a critical step to us in addressing the water issues," Petersen said.

Petersen said there is no way to develop the agriculture industry without infrastructure.

"There is very limited infrastructure today in agriculture," he said, adding that a consistent water source is a key element.

Even though the DOA has delivered water to St. Croix farmers by truck for many years, Petersen said his department never had a water delivery truck on St. Thomas until it identified resources to purchase one as a result of funding authorized by the 2006 Sustainable Farming Act.

Additionally, Petersen said the DOA purchased 120 water storage tanks that can hold 1,000 gallons to

resell to farmers at a subsidized cost in order to assist crop and livestock producers to increase on-farm water storage capacity to enhance production levels while creating less dependency on off-farm water resources.

The DOA also has installed a new floating raft water pump system in a water storage pond in Estate Dorothea on St. Thomas to increase water resources for farmers, Petersen said. The 1.5 million gallon capacity storage pond was previously offline and not available to farmers for the past 15 years.

When discussing agriculture, Weekes said folks might think about food. He said, however, that agriculture is so much more. He said agriculture production can result in making furniture, clothes and even energy.

"To think you can take grass and make energy is fascinating," he said.

And using Giant King Grass as a fuel source to produce energy is

exactly what Tibbar Energy plans to do on St. Croix. But similar to food crops, the Giant King Grass needs water to grow.

Considering there is such a demand for water when it comes to agriculture production on St. Croix, Petersen said he has been talking with Cornwall to find a way to use the 2 million gallons of wastewater that WMA treats on a daily basis as a water source for food crops rather than continuing to release the treated water into the Caribbean Sea.

Cornwall said the initial idea was to use the treated wastewater, or effluent water, for food crops. She said, however, there was concern whether the water would be clean enough to be used on food crops. She said a decision was reached to have Tibbar Energy use the effluent water as a water source for its Giant King Grass since it will not be consumed. And since Tibbar Energy has the ability to accept up to 6 million gallons of water a day, Corn-

wall said the WMA will transfer all of its effluent water to Tibbar Energy, which plans to build a 7 megawatt power-producing facility on the South Shore next to the WMA Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Kevin Rames, attorney for Tibbar Energy, conducted a presentation during the meeting on behalf of the renewable energy development company's president and chief executive officer, Tania Tomy, who was ill.

Rames said Tibbar Energy has committed up to \$70 million for the development of a biogas facility on St. Croix. Such a facility would be able to use Giant King Grass as a fuel source to produce renewable electricity. Rames said Tibbar Energy plans to sell power to the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority.

"The negotiations between Tibbar Energy and the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority are ongoing and directed at entering into a power purchase agreement for 7 megawatts," he said, adding the parties are also negotiating an interconnection agreement to connect the biogas power plant to the WAPA grid.

Rames said the power purchase agreement will be for 25 years with a five-year extension. He said Tibbar Energy would operate and manage the facility during the entire length of the agreement.

Aaron Smyth, a consultant with Tibbar Energy, said the company plans to sell power to WAPA at a rate between 23.5 and 25 cents per kilowatt hour during the length of the agreement.

After WAPA and Tibbar Energy work out the power purchase agreement, Rames said it must be approved by the WAPA governing board and the Public Services Commission, which regulates utilities.

Additionally, Rames said Tibbar Energy is negotiating with the Virgin Islands Port Authority to lease the land needed to build the power-producing facility. The land, owned by VIPA is located between the WMA Wastewater Treatment Plant and the Randall "Doc" James Racetrack. Rames said he is hopeful that the VIPA Property Committee will make a decision by May 29.

Endangered lizard thriving on Buck Island after being translocated

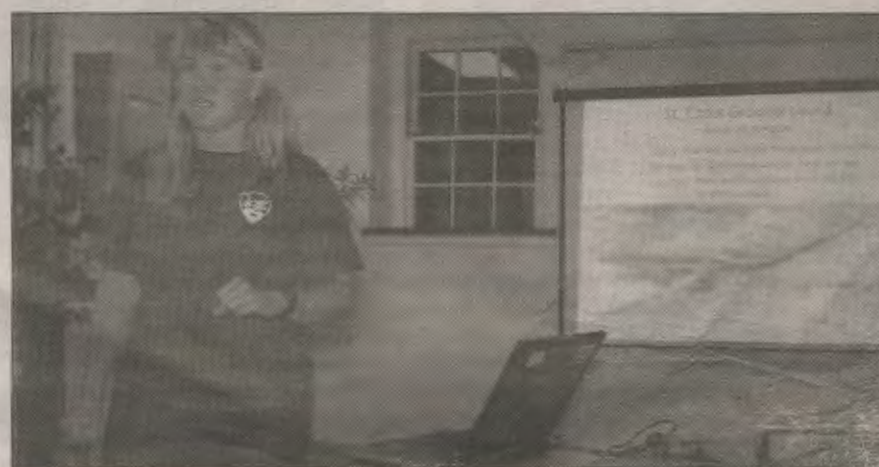
TOM EADER

ST. CROIX — The endangered St. Croix ground lizard is "doing really well," a graduate student from Texas A&M University, who has been studying the lizard at Buck Island Reef National Monument, reported on Thursday.

Nicole Angeli, a herpetologist, is completing her doctoral work in applied biodiversity science by focusing her project on the reintroduction of the St. Croix ground lizard (*Ameiva polops*), an internationally-recognized endangered species. She updated the com-

munity on the status of the lizard at Buck Island during a presentation at the Danish Guinea West India Company Warehouse in Christiansted as part of the National Park Service lecture series.

Angeli said the lizard once inhabited all the coastal areas on St. Croix, but mongoose consumed them for years until authorities became concerned in the 1950s that there wouldn't be any of the lizards left. Today, she said the lizard can only be found



Nicole Angeli, a graduate student from Texas A&M University, who is completing her doctoral work by focusing on the reintroduction of the endangered St. Croix Ground Lizard; provides the community with an update of her project as part of the National Park Service lecture series Thursday in the Danish Guinea West India Company Warehouse in Christiansted.

Tom Eader

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on Protestant Cay, Green Cay, Ruth Island and now Buck Island. She said they can be found on Ruth Island because 11 of them were translocated there in 1990.

A total of 57 of the lizards were translocated to Buck Island in 2008, Angeli said. Before translocating the lizards to Buck Island, she said all of the black tree rats and mongoose were removed. Since then, she reported that the lizard has successfully developed a breeding population at Buck Island.

"What we're doing now is coming back to see how well they are doing," she said, adding her team randomly selected locations on Buck Island to monitor the lizards in forest areas, woodland areas and shrubland areas.

"Most of our individuals are in these woodland type areas," Angeli said.

Angeli and her team walked Buck Island to count the lizards, assigning two people to the same area to make sure the number of lizards each person counted was similar as well as to make sure no lizards got counted twice. They had to listen for the lizards, too, considering they like to hide under leaves.

"It's pretty good results," Angeli said. "We're pretty pleased."

The observers repeatedly counted 291 lizards, including 214 adults and 77 juveniles.

"We started with 57, so even if this was all the individuals that we saw this year, they've

increased so much," Angeli said.

She said, however, there could be four times as many of the lizards on Buck Island based on abundance estimates. She said the St. Croix ground lizard lays one to three eggs at a time.

"It really increases its resilience and persistence over time," Angeli said.

In addition to increasing their population, she said the lizard has dispersed 800 meters from the location on Buck Island where it was introduced in 2008.

"I think this means it's more secure for the future and it was worth our time and energy," she said, adding it's difficult to have a successful translocation.

And Angeli couldn't have found out the information she did without assistance from the National Park Service.

"I think because of the resources and support of the Park Service this very quickly became a successful project," she said.

She was assisted by Clayton Pollock, NPS biological science technician, and Ian Lundgren, NPS biologist, as well as NPS Student Conservation Association interns Katie Auer, Nathan Schwartz and Zeth Westfall.

Angeli said she hopes to return next spring to continue her project. She wants to learn whether adult lizards or juveniles take the journey from the initial translocation site on Buck Island to other parts of the island. She said she also wants to learn what route they take, whether it be through the forest or woodland.