

History of The Reef, Teague Bay, St. Croix

By Annie Fournier

Note: Annie Fournier, daughter of original owner John E. Walley, wrote this history in 2022, based on various documents her father collected and which are now stored in a digital archive on The Reef website. A digital photo archive is also available on the website.

Development & Early Years

The Reef development was created by brothers Grover and Harry Robbins of Blowing Rock, NC, in the late 1960s. Their corporation, the Carolina Caribbean Corporation (CCC), had developed Hounds Ears and Banner Elk in North Carolina. Positioned on the island of St. Croix in a valley above Teague Bay, The Reef was intended to consist of five sections, over 200 villas, of one- and two-bedroom units that would serve as condominiums and also as hotel accommodations. The architect, who had won design awards throughout the South, was Bruce McCarthy from Kingsport, TN. To quote the CCC sales brochure, "The Reef is a totally planned, self-contained resort complex on a hillside site of 142 acres overlooking Teague Bay and Buck Island, whose national park facilities make it the snorkeling capital of the world."

The land which The Reef occupies was purchased in the 1950s from Peter Skov for approximately \$147,000. The Skov family still owns the property above the 7th and 9th fairways and uses much of the land to raise goats. Originally the developers also planned for a convention center, beach club hotel, and an airstrip. According to Pat Coupard's 2004 short history of The Reef, one member of the Skov family recalls that planes occasionally took off and landed at The Reef "until one took out the fence and the goats escaped." That, she said, was the end of the airstrip. At first the development was ridiculed by the local folks. Some names for the complex were: "De Huts," "The Chicken Coops," "Snaggle Tooth Ridge." Later great praise and further awards were given to the architect for the design (reportedly featured in *Architectural Digest*), which allows for each villa to have an unobstructed view, privacy, substantial airflow using jalousie louvered wooden windows, positioning which faces north in the valley resulting in very little direct sun, all utilities underground as well as being constructed to withstand Hurricane Force 4 winds.

As work progressed with the construction of the two-bedroom villas of 1,654 square feet, being sold for \$94-98,000 (depending on view), and the one-bedroom villas of 1,300 square feet, being sold for \$38-65,000, **the golf course** was designed and supervised by the CCC in-house golf course architect, Dennis Lehman. Dennis supervised the landscaping of the golf course around the villas. According to Don Manning, CCC Vice President and first General Manager of The Reef, plants came from a landscape contractor in Ft. Lauderdale by the container

load...everything was quality and of the best varieties. In 1971, Allain Fevrier was hired as the golf course supervisor of the 9-hole, par 35 course. He remained in that position for over 40 years. Topsoil for the course was brought in from Frederiksted, as was sand for the beach. The golf course was kept in excellent condition by means of thousands of gallons of water, often totaling 10,000 gallons each night, used on the fairways and greens. The units/villas were never planned with cisterns for rain collection because there were five or six excellent wells on the property. When the demand on the wells increased, the water became brackish and could not be used for drinking, thus a reverse osmosis (RO) plant was built. It operated on diesel fuel, but often failed and would not be working for several days at a time. The water is pumped up the hill from the RO plant. The villas and pool are supplied by a gravity system. Currently RAI has a large steel tank and two concrete cisterns available for water storage of 700,000 gallons. Dependable power was a continuous problem. Many early owners kept propane grills, oil/alcohol lanterns and candles in their Owner's Closets.

The pool was installed and a restaurant was opened in 1969-70. The restaurant was in what is now a combination of villas 450 and 451. There was a 20' wide deck about 100' long wrapped around the building. Story goes...Jimmy Hamilton (American jazz clarinetist and saxophonist) was hired to play at the restaurant. Don Manning reported, "One night when Jimmy was playing, Dizzie Gillespie came to see him and ended up playing his trumpet down on the fourth green."

The first phase of fifty two-bedroom units (Section IV) was completed in 1969, and on September 16, 1970, the Declaration of Covenants, Conditions, and Restriction and Bylaws for The Reef Condominium-Section IV was recorded with the U.S. Virgin Islands Government. Ten months later on July 8, 1971, an identical document was recorded for the fifty one-bedroom units for Section I. September 26, 1972 a "Declaration of Restrictions-Homesites" was registered with the VI Government. It should be noted that on the drawing board were plans for three additional sections--II, III, and V. Section III was laid out on the slope above the 5th hole and Section II above the 6th hole. These were never completed. At that time, in late 1971, the villa owners had as their property approximately 7 acres of common land within each Section, a 30-foot entry easement from Meggie Hill Road to each section, and those units which had been sold. Title to the remaining 100+ acres, all unsold villas, common buildings, and recreational facilities continued to be held by CCC's St. Croix Ltd. The Reef provided a laundry service and daily maid service for the "hotel" guests (villa rentals). There was a long, extensive pier/dock (see photo archive) that reached out into Teague Bay from the 1,200-foot white sand beach. This pier was very popular with visitors and locals. It provided excellent docking for boats, fishing, wildlife viewing of turtles and pelicans, and sunbathing off the sand. It was destroyed by Hurricane Hugo in September 1989. A Jitney service provided transportation throughout the "resort." In the early years, there were two cabana style refreshment locations ("beach bars") on the beach, serving mostly drinks (see photo archive). Between 1968 and 1972, CCC stock, which had started at \$2 a share, had soared to \$70 a share. A charter airline brought in 200 visitors at a time to stay at The Reef. They were welcomed at the airport with

drinks and the music of a steel band. CCC had eight planes, one a Lear Jet, that they used to bring in hotel guests. As reported by Don Manning, "In the early days, with the hotel going, maid and laundry service was daily, construction employees and gardeners, there may well have been 500 employees at one time during construction."

Having planned The Reef as a resort, the developers were somewhat more interested in that aspect of the operation than in the sale of condominiums, which were sold with the understanding that they would be used for several weeks by the owners and rented by the resort managers to vacationers for the balance of the year. At that time, there were locks on the doors of each bedroom and the living room/kitchen door so that the owner might rent only one bedroom and the living room area or the entire kitchen. Each villa had a locked Owner's Closet in which they could permanently store personal items. The villas came fully furnished with original owners selecting among a choice of color schemes. The furnishings included original artwork, kitchenware, garbage disposal, fridge with icemaker, china, glassware, silverware, linens, towels, ashtrays, area rug and wall to wall carpeting in the bedrooms. The outdoor furniture was Knoll terrace furniture. Knoll designs are found in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, including those which were part of The Reef furnishings. A copy of the original one-bedroom villa furniture package which included living room, bedroom, and dining furniture as well as lamps, linens, appliances, glassware, china etc. can be seen in the document archive. As stated in a CCC promotional brochure, "Stability is a keynote at The Reef. It begins with life under the American Flag, and it extends to villas that are virtually indestructible and maintenance-free." That can be noted in the construction of the villas, using concrete block walls reinforced by vertical steel rods with the blocks filled with poured concrete. The roof was constructed of termite-proof 4x12 roof beams, which were tied down with steel rods running through the walls to the base of the foundation. The tops of the beams were covered with solid reinforced concrete to further anchor them in place and form parapets. Heavy 26 tongue & groove roof decking was used for the floors and ceilings. Fluorocarbon blown urethane foam was used for the roof covering, which provides a seamless, water resistant and fire-retardant roof immune to rot. The roofs were then coated with Hypalon to provide further sealing and a pleasing texture and color. The floors were hard-set brick laid over concrete, except for the carpeted bedrooms. All power lines were laid underground. (See "Facts About Construction and Facilities" in the document archive.)

In the early 70s, to enter Section I, it was necessary to go through lighted gate posts (just north of Villa 101 above Villa 127) from Meggie Hill Road. The entrance from the coastal road was in place as it is now, but originally one could not drive directly from Section IV to Section I. That connection between the sections was later made. There was also an entrance next to the original laundry (now the food concession/golf shop) that accessed both Sections. The food concession next to the "pro" shop has had several names (The Pantry, The Bread Basket, Just in Case Deli, TLC Kitchen) and various operators.

Fountain Valley Incident/Development of RAI

On September 6, 1972, five residents of the Virgin Islands, in a robbery attempt at the Fountain Valley Golf Course (renamed Carambola), killed 8 people and wounded 8 others. All five Afro-Caribbean defendants were convicted after a trial and each sentenced to eight consecutive life terms. The public's perception of a racial motivation for the killings and fear of further violence led to a steep decline in tourism to St. Croix.

After the Fountain Valley incident, the real estate and resort market disintegrated. "We were still spending a lot of money operating the hotel (villa rentals) and golf course," said Don Manning. "Eastern Airlines cancelled flights to the island and were advising people not to come to St. Croix. The resort business went way down. Some prospective buyers at The Reef opted to lose their deposit rather than complete the purchase." Further development at The Reef ceased and CCC went into bankruptcy. According to Don Manning, there was an RO plant operating on oil power. It brought its problems and was "down" 50% of the time, mostly due to lack of expertise. Meanwhile, The Reef was getting water bills from Schuster (who refilled the water tank) averaging \$10,000 to \$50,000...\$70,000 each 90 days. Originally, CCC ran and controlled the golf course, beach, swimming pool, and the villas in the rental pool. George Demas was one of the first presidents of the owner's association. With income dropping in 1972, CCC, which claimed to have invested over 12 million dollars, was forced to seek refuge in Chapter 11 of the bankruptcy code. In 1973, a small "well-heeled" group of interested villa owners attempted to buy the complex, but they were unable to raise the required financing. All owners then joined together, and on April 3, 1974, recorded the Articles of Incorporation for The Reef Associates, Inc (RAI), a corporation in which each Reef villa owner became the owner of one share which is inseparable from villa ownership. By paying CCC one dollar and assuming the existing debt for the approximately \$2.3 million loan, RAI acquired the title to the fifty unsold villas, 129 + acres, and the common facilities which included the office, golf pro shop, water plant, beach, pool and tennis courts. On September 17, 1976, a new Declaration of Covenants and Protective Restrictions for The Reef Condominium was recorded with the government of the US Virgin Islands. Under this document 75% of the owners of both Section I and Section IV gave RAI complete control of all assets and autonomy in determining common costs and their allocations. (RAI by-laws) The by-laws of each of the condominium associations (Section I and IV) were amended to provide for a joint Board of Directors of 10 (5 directors from each Section) and to engage RAI as the managing agent for both sections. Subsequent resolutions were adopted by owners at the Annual Meetings. Since 1976 the Annual Meeting has been an RAI shareholder meeting and while the RAI by-laws are nearly identical to the homeowners, the RAI Articles of Incorporation have given the joint Board wide operational latitude. Each Section condominium association also holds an Annual Meeting where they elect their directors which then become part of the joint RAI Board. This combined meeting is held in February each year.

This was the beginning of a long hard time during which the owners took over the management. Annual meetings were held in different cities such as New York and Boston. Very often the manager would go to the meeting “off island” and never come back to The Reef. According to the minutes of the first annual meeting following Hugo on February 15, 1992, RAI President Bobby Broderick stated that in 1979 there had already been *eleven* different RAI general managers in *eight* years. Broderick went on to say, “The 70’s was the ‘out of control’ era, 1983 saw the beginnings of the ‘restoration of law and order’ era, 1987 heralded the ‘complete return of control’ era, and of course 1989...the devastation of Hurricane Hugo.” Instrumental to maintaining stability was the employment of a reliable General Manager. Jim Davenport was hired and remained in that position for sixteen years (1990 to 2006).

During the late 70’s and early 80’s, RAI attempted to expand the small beach club concession, which served food and beverages. The Reef Beach was popular with local folks and with visitors due to the expansive pier/dock. The quality of the beach sand was excellent. There were several attempts by restauraners to provide this service though a contract with RAI to rent the structure/building. Most did well during the winter season but could not survive the off-season, which could be eight out of twelve months. In May of 1983, Frank Duggan established **Duggan’s Reef Restaurant**. The name came from the old John Wayne movie “Donovan’s Reef.” Over the years, many celebrities have dined at Duggan’s Reef: among them actors Bill Murray, Michael J. Fox, Walt Frazier....Joe and Jill Biden...Ted Kennedy and family...and favorite customer Rachel Robinson, the widow of the baseball great Jackie Robinson. The restaurant suffered significant damage in 1989 with the arrival of Hurricane Hugo and again in 2017 with Hurricanes Irma and Maria. After the 1989 and the 2017 destruction of the restaurant, RAI was responsible and able to rebuild. Frank Duggan has maintained his high quality of food, beverages, and service for 39 years, as of this writing.

Hurricane Hugo slammed into St. Croix on September 17, 1989, and stalled for almost twelve hours with wind gusts close to 200mph. It was the first hurricane to damage St. Croix in over 60 years. According to Chuck Taylor’s Reef Notes of March 2019, the vegetation (trees, bushes, shrubs) was completely defoliated. One could see the yellow/black feathers of the sugar birds (Bana quits) plastered on the white villa walls. The Reef was without power for close to six months. Year-round residents rescued canned goods from villas and set up a grilling system to provide meals for nearby East End residents. Everyone was required to contribute whatever food they could find and take turns as kitchen help. Frank Duggan emptied his restaurant supplies. The restaurant was completely crushed and had a large sailboat sitting in the kitchen area. Since the island was essentially lawless for a time, East End residents established a barrier on the East End Road guarded 24 hours a day. Looters knew that the men were armed. There was originally a beautiful bridge across the pond near the third tee box that probably ended up in the Caribbean. Though never replaced, the footings can still be seen. The original pool pavilion was destroyed, and owner/architect Don Coupard (who designed the Congressional Club House in D.C.) designed the current pavilion, which has now withstood numerous subsequent hurricanes. The columns supporting the current pavilion are concrete-filled.

RAI President C.R. Broderick (Bobby) received his first direct contact from the General Manager on September 25, 1989. The call was limited to 5 minutes. Bobby sent out a letter "To All Owners," reporting, "The Reef has suffered severe damage but NO INJURIES, thank God! ... Individual villa damage ranges from slight to severe....All buildings are insured for complete replacement cost up to a maximum of \$8,300,000.00. Our carrier, Marshall and Sterling has already visited the property.....The office, Pro shop, store, water tank, RO plant, and sewage plant appear to have suffered very little damage....Villas are being boarded up by our workmen as fast as they can get material and the time.... I have been unable to get any funds released from the Chase Manhattan Bank....I will be on the first plane flying to St. Croix." Bobby did arrive and used a cam recorder to take video of each villa. This video is "somewhere" on YouTube. In minutes from the first RAI Annual Meeting minutes held after Hugo, February 15, 1992, there is an Insurance Recap, which states that the Net Settlement for insurance was \$3,195,994 and the Hugo Expenses were \$3,773,654. Bobby praised owner participation in donating their time and expertise where needed.

As previously noted, *Jim Davenport* assumed the position as General Manager and remained until 2006. *Paul Watson* then was hired and reconfigured the staff from 17 full-time employees to approximately 8. He opted to contract out the landscaping and RO maintenance. In 2008, *Mike Hanne* became General Manager. He was able to expand several services by securing grant money to update and expand the RO plant as well as the water storage facilities. In 2019-2020 an 18-hole Disc Golf Course was installed. *Jason May* became General Manager in 2020 and has made changes to staff, golf amenities, and, with the help of volunteers, established a popular Pickle Ball court as well as many social activities.

Hurricanes

Since Hugo (1989), The Reef has been damaged by Hurricane Marilyn (1995), "Wrong Way" Lenny (1999), Omar (2008), Irene & Emily (very slight damage in 2011), Irma and Marie (2017).

Sale of Property

In 1989 RAI contracted to sell nineteen acres for \$750,000 to Villa Madeline. The transaction took place in early 1990, and the funds were used to reduce assessments over a five-year period, to create a reserve fund for emergencies, to build the sewer plant, and to provide cash for current and future operating experiences. In 2003, RAI sold the west end of the beach property to Kevin Brandt for \$995,000. That piece has not been developed and is now protected due to the location of mangroves.

Botanical History

In the early days, the developers hired and paid the many construction employees and gardeners. Allain Fevier came to the island in 1967. He had been trained in agriculture in St. Lucia and hired by The Reef for golf course maintenance. In the beginning, there were four people working on the golf course. In Pat Coupard's botanical history, she quotes Fevier, "When

we reworked the greens, people were pulled off the grounds crew. Since I knew about plants, when landscaping was done, I helped to place the plants around villas and the grounds crew planted them.” Many of those original plants (brought by container load from Ft. Lauderdale) still flourish around the villas. The Reef is a harsh environment, windy with much rock and sparse soil, little rain for much of the year and too much rain at other times. Much of the vegetation was completely stripped during Hurricane Hugo, but the hardy varieties came back...as if they just needed some pruning. After Hugo, a group of owners began contributing time, expertise, and funds to what became the “Green Team.” As their interest and commitment grew, a green house was built with screen cloth, drip irrigation, pots and trays, soil mixtures, planting benches and donated plants. Owners Pat and Don Coupard were major contributors and owner Ivan Blough donated time and materials to build the nursery. Several Hurricanes and encroaching “mangrove jungle” have tried to destroy the green house, but thanks to the efforts of a new generation of owners, the nursery has survived and is currently being used by owners. Many of the plants cultivated in the green house are transplanted to locations on the golf course and around the villas. A partial source for learning just what plants are on The Reef property can be found by reviewing “Plants of the Reef” which is attached to The Reef Website.