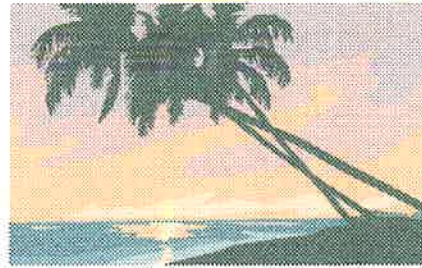


Long Range Planning

Reef: A Botanical History..... by Pat Coupard

It was one day in 1965. I was on the golf course at Hound Ear's where I often entertained my clients (I was working for Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Sales Co. then), when a small single engine plane landed on the fairway right where we were playing. Out jumps Grover Robbins. That's when I first met him. He was a great land developer and had visions for many large resort projects." said Don Manning who came to St.



Croix in 1968 as the Executive Vice-President of Carolina Caribbean the developers of The Reef.

In 2003, Don and his wife Polly were staying at the Reef and I interviewed him about the early days of the Reef. Some description of those early times will be abstracted from that interview as well as the interviews of John Walley, Barbara Benner and Tony and Barbara Bruno, owners at the Reef, and Allain Fevrier and Arthur Khodra, long time employees.

When Don Manning came to the Reef, the two bedroom units were about half finished and the one-bedroom units mostly finished. Grover Robbins and his brother Harry of Blowing Rock, NC, were the developers. When Grover died in about 1969, still in his 40's, Don took charge of this project in St. Croix.

The project consisted of the 101 villas with 100 more planned. It was to be run both as a resort hotel and a condo association. Owners planned to use their units from two to four weeks a year and have the hotel rent them the balance of the time. In the early days a maid and laundry service was provided daily. There was a general contractor but the developers hired and paid the many construction employees and gardeners. A conference center above #5 green, a golf shop above #3 green and a small airstrip were planned but never built.

FEVRIER

Allain Fevrier, who maintains our golf course, came to St. Croix in 1967. He had been trained in agriculture in St. Lucia and went to work at the Carlton Hotel, in Fredericksted, on his first day on the island, January 1, 1967. Mason and Bobbie Smith, original owners at the Reef, were guests at the hotel at the time. In 1971, Allain came to work at the Reef golf course.

In the beginning, there were four people working on the golf course. "When we reworked the greens, people were pulled off the grounds crew," Allain says. "Since I knew about plants, when landscaping was done, I helped to place the plants around the villas and the grounds crew planted them." The plantings were supervised by the golf course supervisor. He had worked with Caroline Caribbean Corporation in North Carolina. "The plants came from a landscape contractor in Ft. Lauderdale. Everything was first class, best varieties and quality. We brought the plants in by the container load," recalls

Don Manning.

26 years later in January of this year

Many of those original plantings still flourish around the villas. In addition to the ubiquitous bougainvillea, alamanda, and palms there are some unusual plants and trees. Many ask about the tree below the pool when it is blooming in February. It has large, double yellow blossoms on bare branches and is appropriately called Virgin Island Peony Tree. It is in horticultural terms, *Cochlospermum vitifolium plenum*, should you care to know. There is also a single form called Buttercup tree. The red and pink ixora, planted in many places near the villas were particularly beautiful the sufficiently moist winter of 2003/4.

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. One of the lovely things, like the deep blue flower ruella, was obtained from the St. George Botanical Garden with the permission of the director who said "You may have all you want but be careful, it is a noxious weed." With care and watering, it survives and blooms in our difficult conditions at the east end. There is no issue of its growing out of bounds.

The original plantings did survive for years with attentive care by a large grounds crew and the use of lots of water as needed. In later years, when CCC went into bankruptcy and the survival of the entire development was in question, many of the original plants died. Hurricanes defoliated some plants and destroyed others. After storms, our manager and the grounds crew collect and dispose of many truck loads of plant debris. We are lucky to have a number of tough survivors still growing.

Some years ago, during one of those chats after a golf scramble, Bunny Bewick and I came up with the idea of a few owners getting together to prune, weed and upgrade the plantings knowing that we, "snow birds", saw things differently than the grounds crew. Bunny dubbed it the "Green Team" and it has been operating with much spirit and success for years. Not only do many owners participate but a few bring their guests and a couple of renters have come to help and enjoy the camaraderie.

About 1994, a nursery, Ardon Gardens, located on the hillside just above Solitude, went out of business. Fuzz and John Fifield purchased two dozen of their Washingtonian Palms that now line the side of the road from the pool to section I. Take a look at them. Despite the great variation in size that you now see, they were all planted at the same time, a striking example of what might happen if you water the palms near your villa to give them a good start. The Fifields also organized a group of Reef owners to bid on a landscape package at a charity auction. That resulted in a donation of the plantings at the entrance walls on the road.

My husband, Don, and I purchased a number of plants and supplies that Ardon Gardens were selling at clearance prices and donated them to the Reef. Screen cloth, drip irrigation materials, pots and trays in large quantity were among the supplies. Ivan Blough donated time and materials to build a plant nursery with a few manually "sprinkled" benches covered with shade cloth and a shed to hold materials. I volunteered at the St. George Botanical Garden to learn more about tropical plants and the techniques for their propagation.

In time, the nursery expanded with more benches, an area with a misting system for propagation, a section for large plants and a hardening off area that is drip irrigated from a "water buffalo." At the end of last season, the nursery was filled with pots of ground covers, small native palms, cuttings of croton, ixora, bougainvillea and alamanda and some seedling trees that may be ready to place on the grounds the winter of 2004-5. Everything was repotted by the end of the winter season and will be cared for each week by one of the Reef staff until next season when owners return. The manager, Jim Davenport, asks that owners check with him before taking plants because some are already earmarked for specific uses on the grounds.

The Green Team now works at the pool several times each winter pruning and weeding. The pool is a particularly difficult site. The plants cannot be mulched with bark since the wind would carry it into the pool. The gravel over ground cloth works as a mulch but makes it much hotter for the plants as the gravel absorbs and holds the heat from the sun. Bobbie Smith, an owner and faithful volunteer on the Green Team, has photographs of the barren pool area post Hugo. Ask her to see them to see how much better the area looks now, a far more attractive setting for our frequent social gatherings.

As some places improved in appearance, others like the uneven rows of palms lining the driveway began, by contrast, to look worse. Someone suggested "Sponsor a Palm," a campaign to collect contributions from owners to add palms to the entrance driveway. As a result about a dozen good sized palms were planted and more have been added each year since from the Reef's landscape budget. Also, each year, a few palms have been planted on the beach. Soon we will be competing for the sunny spots rather than searching for a little shade there. This year a number of palms have been planted on the west side of the section I villas to replace those that have died over the 30 years since the original landscaping. They will improve the tropical appearance of those villas showing their beautiful silhouettes from a distance.

The Reef also buys some palms from Arthur Khodra, another native of St. Lucia, who has worked at the Reef since 1975. He brings coconuts from various Cruzan beaches and plants them at his home, caring for them until they are about 3' tall. He usually sells about 30 to the Reef each year at much less than a nursery would charge. Arthur has a garden at his house with a grapefruit tree, lime trees, papayas, bananas and coconut palms. Those grapefruit are really good! He has built the two houses on the property himself and lives in one with his second wife. Two of his daughters live in the other house. Of his six children, three daughters live on St. Croix. One is a stewardess for American Airlines, one is an administrator in the education office and one imports and sells clothing. What a nice success story for Arthur who has worked for much of his life at the Reef. Arthur says "The Reef is in my heart. Many at the Reef feel like family to me." That makes it family for us too, Arthur.

Plants have been given to us by Margaret Hayes, the knowledgeable former owner of Cruzan Gardens. She is very familiar with the Reef's difficult growing conditions and has donated some of her personal collection which we have cared for in the Nursery and

eventually placed on the golf course. Alain selected the sites for additional trees on the golf course and watered and attended them so that they are now sturdy and growing. He says that there was a grove of trees west of the 9th fairway pre Hugo. Wouldn't it be great to continue to replant that area to again have such a grove?

In 2004, more contributions were made to add to the Reef's budget for landscaping. The social committee has been a significant contributor as have individual owners. This past winter, in an effort to improve the appearance of the entrance to our community, we have added new plantings to show off our unique community. There are more than 50 new bougainvilleas along the wall to the main road. The row of palms along the interior road to the golf shack has been augmented. Near the guard shack, islands of crotons, mulched and drip irrigated border each side of the drive. Behind the aloe, weeded and mulched, and the mahogany trees that have finally started to grow, are 50 purple bougainvilleas, six Mac Arthur palms and some pandanus as a windbreak. Most of these new areas are also irrigated. Dale and Ricky, our grounds crew, worked diligently to have all the latest plantings by the gate in place in one day.

A question to Allain Fevrier about planting in front of the pump house, which is prominently seen from the gate and first tee, brought an enthusiastic response. Almost immediately, Allain was out with his backhoe planting pandanus from the nursery, bougainvillea and a palm. Bet you can scarcely see the piping from the pump house into the pond now that it has now been "painted out."

Work on the tear drop shaped planting just beyond the first tee on the left was one of the last efforts of the volunteers in spring 2004. The several ficus trees had flourished. The moment had come to make a decision about their being trees or bushes. A consultation with Margaret Hayes informed us that they have been known to grow to 40' on St. Croix. Not likely at the Reef – but they are getting big! A couple of dedicated pruners, Doug Bewick and Chuck Fortner, circled the ficus warily before deciding on their strategy. After their skilled, hard work on three separate days, with the help of Chuck's guest, they will now become real trees!

It is not fair to name this dedicated pair and not name the long list of volunteers who have attended from one to a dozen meetings of the Green Team. At the next report for the annual meeting I will hope to name them all without forgetting any one.

Most importantly, these group efforts to make the Reef grounds more beautiful have encouraged owners to plant and groom the areas near their villas and increased their enjoyment of our tropical setting.

To be continued with more history in a later letter.

Pat Coupard