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REEFNOTES - MARCH 2019

The seasons are changing in the Caribbean and whether or not the groundhog saw his shadow last month will never influence the lovely weather on St. Croix. While the winds kick up a lot this time of year, they are gradually shifting from the Christmas winds to the traditional trade winds. Some days will feature a chop in Teague Bay and the wind direction will vary from north to either side of east, one day warmer with calm seas and the next cooler with swells and more clouds. That's a non-technical description of a local spring, but the winds combined with the lack of rain have once again turned our front yard into a beige carpet and the greens have become harder and faster - and the "Reef roll" that we golf dreamers love allows us to sometimes feel we're ready to qualify for the seniors tour. Believe me, that's local humor at its best as our "power" drives fade with age. But we are indeed flowing into springtime and the ocean water is warmer than the pool.

The Reef is changing so much with a new generation of owners that it's worth relating a bit of its history. Around 1970, when Carolina Caribbean Corporation (CCC) broke ground to build the dream that it is today, 101 villas called The Reef, there was only a dirt road heading east - maybe sometimes not a lot worse than East End Road when it is recovering from the potholes and washed out sections after a hurricane. The land was purchased from the Skov family whose descendents still own the adjacent goat farm; that land also included the property that is now Villa Madeleine which was purchased from RAI in the later 1980s. The single bedroom villas began the construction, the two bedrooms underway well before Section I was completed. Original projected costs for a one bedroom villa were \$42,500 - 59,500 with \$75 monthly maintenance fee and for two bedrooms \$69,500 - 85,000 with \$100 monthly maintenance. Those prices have bounced radically since then depending on the "Fountain Valley Massacre" (a 1972 event that turned St. Croix upside down for a number of years), hurricanes, Hovensa's boom and bust, and the accompanying economic influences. Other parts of the CCC dream were three bedrooms above the driving range, a landing strip for private planes, and a small hotel across the street at the far end of the beach; you can still see the walls and entrance for that hotel through the brush before you go around the first corner to the west.

While villas were sold to individual owners, rentals could also be made to two tourist couples in Section IV villas, each bedroom acting as a hotel room and the kitchen/dining/ living area available on a shared basis; let your imagination run with that concept! There was maid service, a laundry where the pro shop/deli are now, a small restaurant in 451, and a beach bar across the street. The golf course was in beautiful shape at that time since the original developers watered it every night; there were wells (which became brackish after Hurricane Hugo in 1989) and original pumping stations functioned every night - something else to imagine today. One of the other amenities was a van that cruised around the complex bringing folks to the golf course, restaurant, tennis courts, pool, etc., so that there was no need for a car unless you wanted to hit the Christiansted bar scene, which often continued until four in the morning. The Reef beach was the place to go with plenty of beach furniture, attendants to care for the bathing suit crowd, and windsurfers available on the beach by Duggan's (some of us still have Buss Benner paintings of the colorful sails crossing Teague Bay). Swimming was a pleasure because of the long dock extending from Duggan's deck which protected the beach and limited the grass and stones. Frank

Duggan's was expanded from a simple beach bar to a restaurant where you had to wait for an hour for lunch if you didn't have reservations, and your rum punches were delivered to you on the beach - all day!

Stone
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Early on in the 1970s, CCC ran into financial problems before Section IV could be finished. The original water plant was oil powered and operated about 50% of the time. Coupled with the collapse of the local market after 1972 and extravagant water bills, the finances of CCC were nearing an end. Surviving on a razor's edge until 1974, CCC had to sell what existed. A well-heeled group of owners rescued the young Reef, purchased the assets for \$1, and assumed \$2.3 million of debt, arranged remaining construction, and incorporated the development into The Reef Associates, Inc. (RAI). The new owners were eventually able to sell villas that had never been on the market to protect the association. There were rough years through the 70s into the early 80s as RAI boards gradually developed The Reef into the appealing community it is today. Two of the best tales originating from those turbulent early days included the renter who kept chickens in his yard with a 4AM rooster, and the manager (actually named Johnny Carson) who shot a wild boar that ventured onto his patio and later distributed the pork to owners' refrigerators.

Hugo

While The Reef has always been in a state of flux, Hurricane Hugo created the greatest changes of all in September 1989 after spending almost twelve hours working across the island with gusts close to 200 mph. We were without power for almost six months. Year round residents rescued canned goods from villas and set up a grilling system to provide meals for Reef people and nearby residents; everyone was required to contribute whatever food they could find and take turns as kitchen help. Since the island was essentially lawless for a time, east end residents established a barrier on East End Road guarded 24 hours a day and looters knew that men on duty were armed. There was 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 pavillion was destroyed, and owner/architect Don Coupard (who designed the Congressional club house in D.C.) designed the current one which has now withstood numerous hurricanes. At first, owners referred to it as the "Taj Mahal" due to the columns which replaced the two by fours of the original. The majority of the trees and palms you see today were planted after Hugo.

The history of The Reef is fascinating, an ongoing story with no end. It remains our little bit of paradise for those of us who had a dream and have experienced the pleasures of our community and the island for so many years, and I hope new owners will grow to love it as much.

Chuck Taylor

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