

## St. George Village Botanical Garden Needs Help to Regrow

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When Dewey Hollister, executive director and director of horticulture of the St. George Village Botanical Garden, and Amy DeSorba, director of development and administration, set out their goals for the at the beginning of the year, trying to save their precious trees and plants after the destruction of two category five hurricanes was not one of them.

But they are doing just that. The Garden sustained severe damage to its structures as well as to its vegetation and now it needs the help of the community to regain its long-known image as the third most popular tourist attraction in St. Croix.



Dewey Hollister points out plants that survived Hurricane Maria.  
(Jamie Leonard photo)

“If you want to keep a plant, give it away,” is Hollister’s motto, because the only way to ensure a species survival is to spread it around, making sure it is thriving in more than one location. Hollister said sharing different plant species with other locations and gardens is the way to make sure that plants survive through disasters and close-extinction.

Touring the St. George Gardens post-hurricane Maria, it is obvious that most of the palm trees sustained damage. If the palm is standing, Hollister said, then it will survive, but if the trunk snaps, then it’s gone forever. In order to save some of its younger plants, the garden staff brought everything from the nursery into the Great Hall which – though sustaining damage to its roof and other parts of the structure – did protect the plants from the storm’s wrath.

The garden is planted on an 18th and 19th century sugar cane plantation, which is also the site of an Amerindian settlement from 100 A.D. Many of the garden’s plants are native to the Virgin Islands and some unique to St. Croix. The manjack plant, with its orange veins, is native to St. Croix, but a type of manjack also exists in the rest of the US Virgin Islands and in Puerto Rico.



A destroyed palm tree at the St. George Village Botanical Garden.  
(Jamie Leonard photo)

As the garden is financed solely by private donations, Hollister and DeSorba have come up with creative ways to encourage tourists to visit. They created an “underwater reef” above ground and filled with plants. This is meant for

those tourists who may not be avid divers but who “want to experience above ground what your friends experience while scuba diving,” Hollister explained. While damaged, the “underwater reef” should make a recovery with time and landscaping.

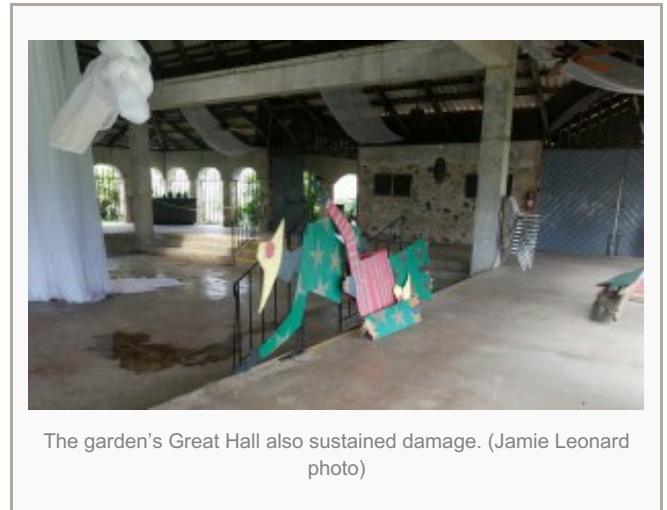
DeSorba was somber when she recounted, “We were the IT venue,” and now events have to be moved. She pointed to a space that was used for a recent wedding and said it doesn’t look anything like the wedding pictures anymore.

But DeSorba is optimistic that by November the garden will be open again. Programs such as “New Season, New Garden” and “Jumbies in the Garden” may have to wait a bit to run again, but new programs and more events are still being planned.

DeSorba said they may need to have a new garden map and the tour may have to be changed a bit, but they will be back better than ever.

In order for the garden to come back and start looking like its old self again, it needs some help. Right now, financial support is the number-one need, as the garden staff knows exactly what needs to be fixed and how it needs to be done. In addition, the garden needs more volunteers to help with cleanup and activities.

Most of all, the immediate need is for heavy equipments operators to donate time and their machines to clear the debris from the garden to make it safe for people to enter the park and to remove fallen trees and scattered plants.



The garden's Great Hall also sustained damage. (Jamie Leonard photo)

In one case in the garden, the storm has created more sun for the butterfly garden, which is now visible yards away.

“In some cases we are leaving signs of the storm intentionally,” Hollister said, pointing to a fallen tree that will still survive and should make a great seating area for visitors. In “four years, you won’t be able to tell” that there had been a hurricane at all, he said.. Luckily, 95 percent of the ruins are intact. Now it’s up to Hollister and DeSorba to try to salvage what is left of the trees and vegetation.

As far as the trees that have been destroyed in the Garden, Hollister would like to partner with people who can take the wood and make something useful out of it. The artist could even sell the finished product out of the garden store and share the profits to benefit both the artist and the garden, and make sure that the wood of the destroyed trees does not go to waste, he said.

“Some of these trees are beautiful and should go as product in the future,” Hollister said.

While passing a large fallen palm tree, DeSorba said one of the ideas for the destroyed palm tree is to cut the palm into smaller “totem poles” and let children decorate the stumps as a way to heal from the storm. Both Hollister and DeSorba would like to see artists come to the garden and make something out of the destruction that is there.

The St. George Village Botanical Garden is a non-profit organization and can receive tax-deductible donations. Those who want to volunteer or donate can contact [infothegarden@gmail.com](mailto:infothegarden@gmail.com) or send donations by U.S. mail to St. George Village Botanical Garden, 127 Estate St. George, Frederiksted, VI 00840.