

# Northshore development to have preserve

I have been approached by many people about the new development above Carambola Golf Course called Scenic Ridge. For sometime now, I have debated this issue within my mind. Some people who I have spoken with get emotional and say, "This area represents our history and struggle of African slaves who regained their physical freedom."

The Scenic Ridge development did not spark as much controversy as the Fountain Valley purchase by outside developers in the early 1980s. However, some Planning and Natural Resources Department officials, for different reasons, were not too pleased at having a new residential development above Carambola golf course. Nonetheless, the parties worked things out together.

The Scenic Ridge development is in Estate Hard Labor, bordering estates River, Bodkin, Fountain, Montpellier, Springfield and Two Friends, and an area between Grove Place and Hard Labor called Tortola, which probably was settled by people who descended from the island of Tortola.

In the early 1980s, the Rockefellers sold more than 4,000 acres of primary agriculture and forest land from Blue Mountain to the rain forest. You know, so many people on St. Croix then were ignorant to the fact that it was 17 estates of primary land, including historical

sites, streams and shorelines — not just the Fountain Valley area — that was purchased by outside developers.

Today, Carambola Beach Resort at Davis Bay includes 4,000 acres and what once was a beach traditionally used by local people. To this day, some people believe the Juan Luis administration sold their birthright when the government allowed outside developers to purchase the land. The government had the same opportunity to purchase the land, but blew it.

Now almost the entire Northside of St. Croix belongs to outside investors who for the most part do not care for the people of St. Croix. Money talks, they say.

When I talk like this, some people get offended. Like those who went before me, however, I am willing to enlighten the people of these islands about issues so they won't be tricked by those who pretend to love these islands.

Those who know St. Croix's Northside would agree with me that this area is one of the most agricultural, cultural and historical areas. It also offers the most breathtaking and spiritually tranquil view. From there one can see Buck Island, St. Thomas, St. John, Tortola, Puerto Rico and other islands.

It was in this area also where runaway African slaves hid in the mountains, forests and valleys.



Olasee  
Davis

## Our environment

Maroon Ridge on the northwestern side of the Caledonia rain forest was where some slaves stayed in a cave for 90 generations. When they were discovered, many of them jumped over the cliff and killed themselves rather than be captured.

Who is this person who wants to develop 147 acres of Hard Labor?

In 1917, Hard Labor was acquired along with Grove Place by the St. Croix Labor Union led by D. Hamilton Jackson. The land remained under union ownership until 1994, when Samuel Raphael purchased the property.

Raphael is a determined young Virgin Islands developer who the banks turned down when he asked for a loan to purchase the land. Even other developers in the area, particularly some whites, did not like to see Hard Labor developed into affordable lots for locals instead of the type of development that is fetching high prices in the surrounding areas. You see, some people believe some parts of St. Croix are reserved for certain classes of people.

Thus, I admire Raphael for his courage in developing sound environmental homesites, even though we sometimes differ on certain environmental issues.

Last week, Raphael invited Ann Williams, George F. Tyson, Rudy G. O'Reilly Jr. and myself to hike with him up Hard Labor's gut forest. Out of the 147 acres, Raphael planned to set aside more than 20 for a nature preserve and a museum.

Hiking trails will be established in this nature preserve. People will be able to discover Hard Labor's old plantation sugar factory ruins, including a great house, windmill towers dating to 1700, fruit trees, ferns and medicinal plants. They also will learn about ecological and cultural history from an Afrocentric perspective.

Around 1780, a small sugar works and animal-driven mill was erected. Its most productive period of sugar cane production was between 1815 and 1848, when the land was owned by the Plaskett family, which included 70 to 75 African slaves.

### ▼ FOR INFORMATION

About the Scenic Ridge nature preserve contact Samuel Raphael at 774-4424.

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