

'New status has given us the tools to conduct our future'

GRAND CASE--President of the Collectivité Louis-Constant Fleming said Monday during his Victor Schoelcher Fête speech that if elements of the population remained complacent without changing their habits, they risk losing St. Martin, the island's future and the future of their children and grandchildren.

He reiterated his appeal for the population to contribute and work together to give the new Collectivité the best chance of succeeding.

"The new status has given us the tools to conduct our future and guarantee the future for our children and grand children. But it is not going to be easy if we don't change our habits," he warned. "A lot of us have slipped into a comfort zone. Take crime for example. If we continue to accept

this state of affairs without correcting it, we will lose St. Martin. We need to be aware. We must work together and bind together. Only by working together can we move forward."

He said the Territorial Council needs the support of the population, describing their work as "immense." He credited the members of his list for accepting the positions offered to them a year ago without discussion or quarrels, and challenged anyone to follow any of them for a day to see just what an individual has to go through.

He noted it might be some years before all the transferred competences at the disposal of the Collectivité could be used, let alone assessed.

"There are opportunities out there knocking on

your door. Please open your eyes," he urged. "St. Martin is yours. Progress is still taking place and you need to be part of it. In 2012I wouldn't want to see some of you still in the same situation as you were in 2007. This is your time, your future, and you need to grasp it."

He continued: "I must admit my job takes tremendous toll on the body mentally and physically, but autonomy has a price. The power to decide the future yourself has a price. Either you want to shape the future yourself or you let someone else do it for you. But we are convinced the new Collectivité with all of its competences is the right way to go. I'm sure in the years to come the people will come to recognise it was the right way to go."

Earlier the Territorial Council members made their way to Grand Case Cultural Centre for the speeches, joining the traditional parade led by the Explorateurs Drum Band.

Vice-president of the Grand Case Cultural Centre Jean-Philippe Richardson welcomed the guests, noting that Grand Case had been the venue a year ago when the newly elected officials of the Collectivité gave their first speeches.

In one of his trademark motivational addresses, Richardson said: "We need to start putting aside our differences and start working together for this little rock we are living on. A lot of people don't realise the value of this island. We need to be together to succeed. Do something for your country instead of criticising."

Secretary General of the Préfecture Claude Liegeon, standing in for Préfet Dominique Lacroix, also gave a short address.

President Fleming noted that as an autonomous overseas Collectivité St. Martin has the right to change the date for the commemoration of abolition of slavery (May 27) to July 21, making this day an official holiday.

He described the abolitionist writer Schoelcher as "a great example of humanism, tenacity and perseverance."



A Hyundai Coupé M-6343 (right) and Hyundai Getz R-1356 (left) collided on Union Road Sunday night after, according to the driver of the former, he left his lane to avoid hitting another vehicle that had abruptly slowed down ahead of him, and hit the Getz in the oncoming lane. Both occupants of the Getz had minor injuries, while the Coupé driver was mostly uninjured because the safety airbags had deployed. However, the vehicles were total losses. Photo by Gromyko Wilson.

Tourist suffers from dehydration while climbing Mount Scenery

SABA--Monday around midday the Fire Department and A.M. Edward's Medical Centre were called out to assist a European Dutch national who had encountered problems while climbing to the top of Mount Scenery.

The man who was visiting the island with his family was suffering from dehydration.

Fire Chief Julio Every and three members of his department, two medical students and the driver of

the ambulance climbed up to Mount Scenery to rescue the tourist.

Upon their arrival they found the man already walking down very slowly. They assisted him down the stairs to the Ecolodge at Rendez-Vouz.

Head Nurse Naomi Wilson decided to take the man to the hospital for observation. The patient was admitted for a few hours and received some medical treatment.

CANDI wants to tackle strays through tourism

PHILIPSBURG--Stray dogs and cats, especially those in bad condition, often turn off tourists from a destination. Building on this and adding the aim of creating meaningful vacations, Cat And Dogs International (CANDI) is seeking to raise funds from the tourism industry to aid local animal groups.

President and founder of the Canada-based organisation Darci Galati says the main goal is to set up a permanent spay/neuter clinic that will help to manage the stray and unwanted population. This, tagged with awareness, should make a dent in the overall situation on St. Maarten.

During her visit to the island, Galati and volunteers Rob and Lydia Forcier have been meeting animal care groups to get a clearer picture of the issues here. They have seen the good and bad facing stray animals here. The situation of dogs, abandoned and scavenging on the landfill was described as "terrible."

"There is an obvious overpopulation that has increased significantly over years we have been coming here," Rob Forcier said about his and his wife's experiences here. They have



Clockwise: I Love My Island Dog Foundation representative Ursula Oppikofer, CANDI President/Founder Darci Galati, CANDI volunteers Lydia and Rob Forcier.

been extending their family of pets on almost every visit here. During this trip they have already rescued two dogs that will be shipped to Canada.

The stray population here is "kind of hidden" from tourists and one has to be keen to find it, Forcier said.

Galati said organisations are in serious need of funding and the tourism industry, such as the cruise lines, is always looking for ways to ensure that clients have the best experiences in the destinations that they visit.

Based on information they collect during this trip, the group will prepare a proposal for funding that will be presented to the larger cruise companies.

Galati believes that if more tourists are aware of

the situation, they will want to help and their effort, combined with that of local groups, can vastly improve the lives of animals on St. Maarten.

CANDI will use St. Maarten as a model for the setting up of other programmes in the Caribbean. The group will also focus on educating visitors about how easy it is to take an animal back home with them. "Many people visit and fall in love with a dog or cat, but think it is too complicated to take it home. They think the animal needs to be quarantined and this is not necessary."

For more information about CANDI, visit candi-international.org or e-mail darci@candiinternational.org.

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