

Local Sloops of Former Days are being Replaced by Island-Made Catamarans

Alongside the mangroves at the Salt River Marina on St. Croix's north shore, a huge shed houses a dynamic young enterprise which has gained fame as far away as Hawaii for its boat building skills. Specializing since 1980 in large double-hulled catamarans of their own innovative design, Gold Coast Yachts is a success story with orders exceeding what the firm's 23 employees can deliver. Looking very different from the traditional sturdy island sloops of former days, local examples of Gold Coast vessels are Captain Heinz's TERORO II and Captain Big Beard's new CRUZANCAT, both chartering to our famous Buck Island Reef National Monument.

Early on, having found no locals with boat building experience, Gold Coast Yachts President, Richard Difede designed an apprenticeship program for high school students and unemployed young Crucians. It operated successfully with government cooperation, enabling graduates to find well-paid jobs with Gold Coast or elsewhere, until disrupted by the September 1989 hurricane. The training program is now being reinstated in Central High School's wood shop classes as well as in the shop at the St. Croix Skill Center. A number of instructors are at hand, and the government supplies the materials for wood and epoxy boat building. Boats completed by apprentices will be made available to the young people's boat handling and swimming program, Kids and the Sea (KATS) created by local Rotary Clubs.

Visitors to the Salt River area with its historic site of Columbus' Landing, the Anchor Dive Shop and adjacent newly-opened Columbus Cove Restaurant at the Salt River Marina, may stop by the boatyard. A call ahead to 778-1004 for an appointment is suggested to prevent disruption of ongoing work.

"Local sloops of Former Days are Being Replaced by Island-Made Catamarans," *St. Croix This Week*, June 1991, p. 1.