

St. John To Get New Ambulance Boat

By Susan Ellis

St. Croix – Gov. John de Jongh Jr. announced Wednesday that a proposal by a local boat building company has been accepted to construct a new ambulance boat to serve St. John and, in maritime emergencies, the territory.

The contract was awarded to Gold Coast Yachts who has building boats on St. Croix since 1985 and just launched their 94th day charter catamaran and the fifth sold to Sandals and Beaches Resorts. Gold Coast vessels are sailing the waters throughout the Caribbean, Hawaii, Florida, Texas and up and down the East Coast of the U.S.

The ambulance boat should be completed in less than five-months after the contract has been signed by the governor, said Gold Coast c-founder and president Richard Difede. He hopes the vessel will be up and running by late fall or early winter.

The vessel will be a 50-foot catamaran with a highly stable working platform and a 300-square foot climate-controlled patient compartment. Difede said the vessel will operate at speeds between 26 to 30 knots per hour and can maneuver in a broad range of sea conditions. The boat will be able to transport up to six patients on stretchers and four to eight paramedics. The maximum passenger capacity is 49 people. The vessel will have the capacity to store medical equipment like defibrillators, cardiac monitors, and storage for waste and sharps disposal and safety belts.

“I am pleased that at long last we will have in place a maritime vehicle that is fast and durable and will put the St John community at ease,” de Jongh said in a written statement. “We wanted a vehicle that could serve the dual purpose of assisting in marine emergencies as well as serve as an ambulance boat, thus, we were very meticulous with design details, even to bringing in a highly –recommended consultant from the U.S. Coast Guard to assist in this endeavor.”

Virgin Islands Department of Health Commissioner Julia Sheen welcomed the news of the new boat which would replace the department’s ailing ambulance boat, the Star of Life.

“I too am please that we’re closer to an acquisition because of what a new ambulance boat will mean for residents.” Sheen said. “It will not only provide for improved and more efficient response times, but safer rescue operations, better maneuverability, access to shallow bays and areas of the St. John coastline. We also anticipate it serving as a back-up water-based emergency response vehicle.”

Susan Ellis, “St. John to get new ambulance boat”, *The Avis*, Thursday, June 24, 2010, p. 5.