

# ST. JOHN SOURCE

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## VIERS Marks 45 Years of Commitment to Environment



It's been 45 years since the University of the Virgin Islands opened what is now called V.I. Environmental Resource Station, and Sunday more than three dozen people gathered to celebrate at the Lameshur Bay, St. John facility.

"We're excited about the future," Allan Hunt, who serves as president of the Clean Islands International board of directors, said.

Clean Islands took over operation of VIERS 14 years ago, and since then VIERS has vastly expanded its scope to serve as a model for living lightly on the planet.

"They take what the National Park Service is all about and deliver it," V.I. National Park Superintendent Mark Hardgrove said, speaking of VIERS' efforts at developing sustainability. The facility sits within the park boundaries.

In addition to many green practices, it is home to a large solar power operation.

Hardgrove said that VIERS was sandwiched between the park and the university, a situation that probably caused Clean Islands some headaches.

"You've had to endure bureaucracy beyond your wildest imagination," Hardgrove said, laughing.

VIERS officially opened Nov. 1, 1966, but Brown said since November is usually a rainy month he waited until December to hold the celebration. However, Sunday's rains forced the celebration to move indoors.

VIERS has long been associated with the Tektite underwater habitat projects, but it opened as an arm of UVI two years before the Tektite staff built the cottages tucked back in the woods that now serves as VIERS base.

Brown said UVI looked at several locations around St. John before settling on the spot at the Little Lameshur Bay ruins, located adjacent to a popular park beach. The spot had some existing buildings that UVI used as the first VIERS facility. Brown said that while it had a dormitory and a kitchen, school groups set up tents near the buildings when they visited.

While VIERS hosted scientists working on St. John-related projects almost since the beginning as well as some student groups, it now is home to the Friends of V.I. National Park summer camps as well as providing educational opportunities for other youth groups.

While Brown and other VIERS staff have worked hard to develop a sense of its history, Brown said he continues to learn more about VIERS' early days.

David Knight, president of the St. John Historical Society, spoke about visiting VIERS during the Tektite Days in 1969 and 1970.

"I remember when every beat-up, funky Jeep had a Tektite sticker on it," he said.

In 1992, the name changed from V.I. Ecological Research station to its current name to reflect its commitment to the environment.

VIERS administrator Randy Brown announced a changing of the guard at VIERS. Randy Fish is taking over as manager from Jamie Irving, who served in the post for the past four years.

"It's more than a job. It's become my home," Irving said.

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