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Youth Environment Forum Review

The Saint Lucia National Trust is already examining how to make the Youth Environment Forum (YEF) 2010 even bigger and better than 2009's activity which has received raving reviews from participants and parents alike as well as onlookers. The first YEF was held from July 13 to 17 and saw some 97 youngsters ages 7 to 18 from all across the island participating in the week long Forum (see Appendix I: Table 1). The main objective of the Forum was to empower youths to become advocates for environment and heritage conservation.

From all indications the children thoroughly enjoyed the programme of activities (see Appendix I.I: Table II). Topics such as Climate Change, Deforestation, Garbage Disposal and Sand Mining among many others were skillfully presented by various resource persons, who often challenged the youth to think about their role as environmental stewards.

The Forum was held at the St. Aloysius R.C. Boys School on July 13, 14 and 16. On Wednesday, July 15 the youngsters were proudly dressed in their YEF t-shirts for their various field trips which served to reinforce the knowledge that was imparted prior to the outings. The closing was held at the Pigeon Island National Landmark on Friday, July 17. The various groups made special presentations in song, poetry and drama. Apart from receiving certificates of participation, one lucky participant from each group received a Super J Green Bag filled with goodies compliments of Consolidated Foods Limited. The curtains were closed with a party, where the children enjoyed cake, ice-cream, hors d'oeuvres and music.

Highlights

There were many memorable moments during YEF 2009 and listing all would prove to be an arduous task. Therefore, the main coordinators have written a brief summary pertaining to their respective groups.

- **Group 1**

Thirty-one youngsters between ages 7 and 10 participated in this year's Youth Environment Forum. During the weeklong activity, the youngsters were exposed to topics such as the effects of climate change, deforestation and solid waste management. They were also eager to put their new found knowledge to use, during the week, and beyond.

Highlights of the week included a tree planting session at the George V Park, a craft activity using waste products generated in the household, and a visit to the Rainforest Sky Rides at Babonneau. The children also gained much from a trip to the Deglos Landfill, and a demonstration of melting ice and its impacts on small islands, like Saint Lucia.

In general, the youngsters were highly enthusiastic about all sessions and field trips, and all requested that they be considered for YEF 2010!

- **Group 2**

Group two was indeed the largest group with 34 and as such posed problematic to handle at times. Nonetheless, it was evident that by the middle of the week most of the participants had become fully engaged in the programme of activities and were disappointed when Friday came.

Group II with the guidance of Mr. Crispin d'Auvergne was responsible for writing the YEF Theme Song entitled the "YEF March" (see Appendix II) which was performed at the Closing Ceremony. The group seemed to have gathered a lot from the sessions and especially enjoyed the paper mache activity where they created two models depicting a healthy forest verses a deforested area.

All the participants said they enjoyed the programme, especially their field trip to the Rainforest Sky Rides and Grande Anse Beach, where unfortunately they saw evidence of sand mining and carcass of several endangered Leatherback Turtles. By way of an evaluation form all the participants of Group II indicated that they would like to take part in YEF 2010.

- **Group 3**

Group III comprised 28 participants aged 14 – 18 years old. The group enjoyed presentations in biodiversity conservation; coastal erosion and water pollution as threats to biodiversity; climate change; solid waste management; the Pitons Management Area; resource management techniques adopted by Sandals Regency, Golf Resort and Spa; the GEF Small Grants Programme; and using the media effectively for advocacy. They also participated in formulating a YEF Declaration on the environment.

The field trip was by far the highlight of the Forum for Group III. The participants were taken to two beaches located along the North East coast, Anse la Voutte and Cas en Bas, and were shown how to retrieve water samples for water quality testing. This was done by a Coastal Environment Monitor from the NCA who allowed the students to participate in retrieving the samples. The day ended with zip lining at Treetop Adventures in Dennery which was meant as a demonstration of ecotourism.

Lessons Learned

The best way to improve any product is to undertake a critical evaluation. As such, the main coordinators of YEF met with the Director in a bid to underscore to highpoints and low points of

the Forum as well as to make recommendations for an improved Forum come 2010. Some of the points brought to the fore included:

- (i) Explore the possibility of decentralizing YEF, with possible locations in Vieux Fort and Soufriere with support from the Saint Lucia National Trust's Southern and Western Chapters.
- (ii) Ensure that the application process commences during the Easter vacation in April.
- (iii) Distribute the week's programme to parents on day 1. This should include guidelines for wearing T-shirts, field trips, general behavior and so on.
- (iv) Devise a backup/contingency plan for each day/activity in the event of inclement weather during the field trip or in the event that a resource person does not show up, etc.
- (v) Draft guidelines for presentations/sessions for distribution to resource persons. Guidelines will include objectives of the presentation, duration, etc.

Where do we go from here?

The young people from Group 3 used their intellectual and creative abilities to draft a YEF Declaration during the Forum (see Appendix III). The Declaration captures some of the environmental issues affecting the island and what they intend to do to solve them. It also calls on the wider Saint Lucian populace and the government to play their role in conserving the island's natural resources. In an effort to inspire Saint Lucians to endeavor to adopt the principles of the YEF Declaration, a few participants will be identified to make an official presentation to the media shortly after school resumes. We are also exploring the possibility of publishing the Declaration in the newspapers as well as present it to Cabinet.

It is essential that we contact in a timely manner as many of the participants as possible to ensure that they execute some of the projects they suggested as part of their **Greening Fair Helen** mission. Therefore, the Trust will identify several participants from the three groups in an effort to form a network of youth organizations. We will work closely with these individuals to form Environmental Clubs in schools where these clubs were non-existent. A by-product of these clubs could be the formation of advocacy groups to tackle various environmental issues affecting communities across the island.

It is also anticipated that several participants from each group will be contacted to record the YEF theme song.

A link for the YEF Television Video that was produced will be available on the Trust's website www.slunatrust.org, as well as photos. The National Television network (NTN) will also be approached to broadcast the video.

The Saint Lucia National Trust would like to thank its many partners and sponsors for making YEF 2009 a success. Special thanks to the British High Commission, Bank of Saint Lucia Jags Incorporated/Island Adventures, Lucelec, Domino's Pizza, Consolidated foods Limited and Peter and Company Limited. We hope you'll all join again us as we strive to improve YEF for 2010.