



The Daily Herald

JANUARY

In January, the eighty men and seven women imprisoned at the Pointe Blanche prison refused to perform their daily duties or leave their cells for recreation or prison work, due what they determined as violations of their human rights, in particular the poor state of medical care inside the prison. Notably, three years after the Simpson Bay bridge operator's booth was knocked into the water by a super yacht entering Simpson Bay Lagoon with a hatch left open, the new bridge attendant's booth was damaged by another mega-yacht.

--The suspect of the first shooting of the year, at 7:00am on New Year's Day, where the victim was critically injured, showed up at the police station in Philipsburg on Monday to turn himself in. He is suspected of firing a gun on New Year's morning near entertainment venues in Maho, where many visitors to the New Year's celebration were still present after sunrise.



A total of 52 vehicles have been identified by police as abandoned in St. Peter's to be towed.



Some 500 students at Milton Peters College (MPC) have painted their self-portraits on several banners.

--The Court of First Instance on Tuesday sentenced O'Neal Arrindell to payment of US \$2,330,000 in the dispossession case filed by the Prosecutor's Office against the businessman for his involvement in the "Emerald" case concerning large-scale fraud at Port St. Maarten.

--Contrary to what is common practice in prisons in the European and Caribbean parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, convicts who are incarcerated in the Pointe Blanche prison in St. Maarten are not subject to a medical intake, the Prison Inmates Association said on the sixth day of the prisoners' general strike.

--The violation of human rights in prison must stop, attorney Sjamira Roseburg said on behalf of the Inmates Association of the Pointe Blanche prison.

--The Kingdom Law to establish the Caribbean Body for Reform and Development COHO is off the table, a fact that Prime Ministers Silveria Jacobs of St. Maarten, Evelyn Wever-Croes of Aruba

and Gilmar Pisas of Curaçao happily announced at the end of the four-country consultation in St. Maarten.

--The newly appointed Minister of Tourism, Economic Affairs, Transportation & Telecommunication (TE-ATT) Leo Lambriex' priority of widening the Simpson Bay Bridge raised concerns with the Party for Progress (PFP).

--The first public meeting of Parliament in 2023 took a different course than planned: instead of addressing current high-risk hillside constructions and erosion on St. Maarten, endangering users of the public roads, Minister Doran presented the national Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) for the next seven years.

--MPs Grisha Heyliger-Marten, Sarah Wescot-Williams and Christophe Emmanuel requested that the President of Parliament convene an urgent meeting with Minister of Justice Anna Richardson regarding the ever-deteriorating situation at the Pointe Blanche prison.

--The continued education of some 2½-dozen special needs pupils is in jeopardy due to the pending closure of Excellence Learning Academy (ELA) Foundation, which is expected to fold operations at the end of this month due to serious financial constraints after one of its main sponsors pulled out.

--Independent MP Solange Ludmila Duncan submitted a proposal to the Presidium and MPs on the creation and implementation of a Digital Thesis Library.

--The Police Force of St. Maarten KPSM has responded to eleven school-related fights since the resumption of classes after the Christmas break on January 3.

--"A solution is being worked on" for the predicament being faced by over



Two sea turtles were fatally struck by vessels in the coastal waters of St. Maarten last week. A green turtle was killed in the area of Simpson Bay.



Twenty-four tenants of Buildings C, D, E and F of Low Estate in Belvedere received the keys to their apartments.



A little over two years after opening in December 2020, boomboom nightclub and beer garden District 721 was completely destroyed by fire.

two dozen special needs pupils, whose continued education is in jeopardy due to the pending closure of Excellence Learning Academy (ELA) Foundation,"

said Minister of Education Rodolphe Samuel.

--Organisers of the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta have announced that Grammy Award-winning international reggae star Koffee will be performing live in St. Maarten at the Regatta Village in Port de Plaisance Resort, Casino, Marina and Spa on March 5, for the 43rd edition of the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta.

--On behalf of the Monument Council, chairman Patrice Gumbs expressed their "profound sadness and anger" with the destruction of parts of historic Diamond Estate.



During a covert operation, the famous ruins at Diamond Estate, of high historical and cultural importance, were destroyed with the help of an excavator.

FEBRUARY

During the month of February, Independent MP Christophe Emmanuel described the work that has been done to construct the new St. Maarten General Hospital as "The world's most expensive foundation". On another note, King Willem-Alexander stated he will not apologise for the Netherlands' role in the Atlantic slave trade on behalf of the royal family, though he understands the importance of an official apology.

--Mounting financial issues forced the Excellence

Learning Academy (ELA) to fold its operations and close its doors the last day of January as was earlier indicated by Director Alisha Brookes. Last-minute efforts to keep the doors open were not fruitful.

--Venezuelan national Henri Ramon Gonzalez Reyes (32) was sentenced to 15 years for stabbing three members of a visiting baseball team from Venezuela who were celebrating their team's victory at a bar in the Zagersgut area on Valentine's Day, February 14, 2021.



NPower held its "Connect and Inspire" Conference, bringing together more than 125 representatives of non-profit organisations (NPOs) and stakeholders from St. Maarten and neighbouring islands.



A large amount of oil leaked from a container that was placed on the sand bank opposite the sports auditorium in Philipsburg.



Windward Islands Teachers Union (WITU) members skipped the classroom and gathered at John Larmonie Center due the lack of communication and acknowledgement of the memberships' concerns.

--The One SXM Association is calling on King Willem-Alexander to issue "a sincere apology" for the Dutch Kingdom's involvement in slavery, the transatlantic slave trade and for continuing colonialism.

--More than forty animal welfare organisations, including the Humane Society International/Europe, World Animal Protection NL, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) Netherlands, the Vervet Monkey Foundation and the Born Free Foundation, have co-signed a letter from Animal Advocacy and Protection (AAP) to the government of St. Maarten calling for refraining from euthanising the island's vervet monkeys.

--The cost to construct the new St. Maarten General Hospital has increased, skyrocketing by "plus 50%" due to, amongst other things, the ongoing war in Ukraine and sharp price increases. This was part of the information shared with members of the Royal Family who met with St. Maarten Medical Center (SMMC) officials shortly after arriving for their two-day visit.

--Minister of Public Health, Social Development and Labor VSA Omar Ottley said that inflation is a major factor in the increase of cost to complete construction of St. Maarten General Hospital (SMGH).

--A teenage student from a local high school was rushed to SMMC after eating what is believed to have been marijuana-laced cake.

--As of October 2022, based on information provided by the Prosecutor's Office, at least 136 people are waiting to serve their time in prison, Justice Minister Anna Richardson informed Members of Parliament.

--The Court of First Instance has sentenced a



The royal visitors, King Willem-Alexander, Queen Máxima and Princess Amalia learning about the history of Fort Amsterdam.



One SXM members and leading activists at the Government Administration Building, when the group had presented the One SXM "Petition Against Accepting Dutch Apology" for 'Slavery Past' without reparations" to Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs.

prison guard for smuggling 122 grams of marijuana into the House of Detention in Pointe Blanche, as well as for abuse of office.

--The Joint Court of Justice will be hearing the appeals of Claudius Buncamper and his wife Maria Buncamper-Molanus in the so-called "Ruby" investigation after the summer recess, in the second half of this year.

--New Minister of Tourism, Economic Affairs, Transport and Telecommunication (TEATT) Minister Leo Lambriex alluded to a possible internal family dispute related to the property that housed District 721, which was destroyed by a massive fire at the facility recently.

--The Pointe Blanche Inmates Association is accusing the prison management of violating its own house rules. The prisoners, in turn, are accused of having "alternative motives" for their now-month-long strike.

--SMMC says the lack of a general practitioner (family doctor) arrangement that deals with their patients during after hours and weekends leads to overwhelming Emergency Room (ER) visits for non-



A bush fire that broke out in the hills in the wee hours of Sunday morning ravaged the upper platform at Rainforest Adventures atop Sentry Hill.

emergency care, resulting in longer waiting times.

--The family of the late Ossie Hosea Laville said in a statement on Wednesday that they are concerned about (internal) injuries detected in his body and say they may have to verify whether these occurred prior to or during his arrest and detention.

--St. Maarten Carnival Development Foundation (SCDF) re-iterated the importance of its request made months ago to government to not grant any permits for events in the Carnival season that conflict with official Carnival events or those organised by recognised Carnival stakeholders.

MARCH

March was a month of recognition and caring. Local women were honoured on Women's Day, which also saw the launch of a six-week Single Mothers' Empowerment Program; Anna Richardson was celebrated as the first female Minister of Justice, 600 women made use of a free breast and health screening event and Marie Genevieve de Weever School benefited from Teen Times' Period Poverty project. Officers were saluted for Firefighters Week, seniors received chairs from Island Gems, airport employees were appreciated, social workers' achievements were recognised on World Social Work Day, children and seniors were given free eye exams and the library distributed 12,000 books. In sharp contrast, police responded to a rising number of emergencies, two men were shot and thousands of counterfeit products were seized. At the same time, the ninth SXM DOET and the SXM Lagoon Festival were deemed successes, thousands took part in the Causeway Jump-up and St. Maarten made great strides in financing its journey to sustainability.

-- Resources for Community Resilience approved US \$1.03 million in grants in its fifth round of financing to local organisations Sea Rescue Foundation, St. Maarten Yacht Club, AIDS Foundation, Hearts United

Holistic Care Foundation, Helping Hands Foundation, Animal Welfare Foundation, Bishop Ellis Foundation, Home Away from Home, SXM Paws, Cricket St. Maarten, Mental Health Foundation, National Institute of Arts, St. Maarten Hospitality and Trade Association, St. Maarten Youth Council, Fun N' Learn day care, National Sports Institute and Voice of the Youth Foundation.

-- The Central Bank of Curaçao and St. Maarten said the new Caribbean guilders would be introduced in the second half of 2024, replacing the Netherlands Antillean guilder in circulation since 1952.

-- The Ministry of Finance began testing software giving details on units rented via Airbnb and other home-sharing properties in the country.

-- The Court of First Instance ordered an end to the two-month-long prison inmates strike, declining their request for visitors, three hot meals per day and six prison guards per shift, but granting their wish for medical exams of inmates on entry.

-- Several loads of new jet bridge segments were transported under police escort, from Port St. Maarten to Princess Juliana International Airport, for assembly.

-- St. Maarten Animal Wel-



Some 115,000 gallons of pool water with a hazardous level of chlorine went into Little Bay Pond after water was drained from the Raoul Illidge Sports Complex swimming pool, closed due to excess chlorine.



A raging fire on Mary's Fancy Plantation destroyed another monument on the island in the third large fire for the year.



HURRYcane Run, a board game about hurricane preparedness, was given to elementary schools as part of the Child Resilience and Protection Project (CRPP) executed by UNICEF the Netherlands and the St. Maarten government.



Led by the Department of Youth with technical support from UNICEF NL, the Positive Parenting Support Programme (PPSP) certified 52 as facilitators in positive parenting.



A Betta Place Foundation and Angelique Romou hosted the first Women in Leadership Gala to raise funds for women's initiatives, such as sending girls to a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) summer programme.



Fire Department personnel visited St. Martin's Home and interacted with senior citizens by playing games such as dominoes and chess, as part of community activities for Firefighters Week.

fare Foundation, Animal Defenders St. Maarten, SXM PAWS, local veterinarians and US-based non-profit organisation 4 Leaf Rover held a free spay and neuter campaign for cats and dogs at St. Maarten Veterinary Clinic.

-- The Dutch Council of Ministers agreed to give Dutch Caribbean study-financing recipients studying in the Netherlands a citizen service number ("burgerservicenummer") BSN before their arrival, greatly easing their transition to a new environment.

-- Parliament voted unanimously to restore at least NAF. 95,235 to the School Sports Programme before year end with the balance NAF. 95,235 in the 2024 budget, to cover coach stipends, sports materials etc.

-- Some 3,908 persons were de-registered from St. Maarten's Civil Registry as part of its clean-up process, leaving 58,722 persons registered.

-- Radio personality Grace Blijden was presented with the first-ever "The Rising Award" for outstanding and consistent work in media, during the Fourth Annual "The Rising" hosted by Community Hub for Administrative Initiatives' Amanda Vital-Bedminister. Also featured were Tamara Leonard, Natasha Manuela and Ann Marlin.

-- The Steering Committee for the St. Maarten Trust Fund green-lighted three new projects: the Housing Project for affordable housing, the Wastewater Management Project for enhanced wastewater services and the Mental Health Project for improved mental health service, including for drug abuse.

-- St. Maarten's Emergency Debris Management Project received US \$60 million in additional funding apportioned by the World Bank-managed St. Maarten Trust Fund.

APRIL

April saw the return to normal of Carnival festivities, with the usual crownings and competitions, but marred unfortunately by a stabbing in Festival Village. Schools had a busy month with the Science Fair Awards Ceremony; Academy students cleaned a beach and travelled to Croatia, Georgia and Trinidad; Hillside School launched an in-school waste management programme and celebrated

Business Day; Learning Unlimited held a Military Day; a Montessori student won the "Butterfly Story" competition and the Royal Marines visited primary schools to bring awareness of those who fought for freedom in World War II.

-- The first World Stray Animals Day Sunset Sail hosted by Aqua Mania Adventures raised US \$3,000 that was shared equally between Animal Welfare Founda-

tion, SXM Paws and Animal Defenders.

-- Parliament's Committee for Constitutional Affairs and Decolonization selected members for a petit committee to research a consultative referendum on independence. Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs opined that St. Maarten should attain a level of financial independence before striving for actual independence.

-- Bureau Telecommunications and Post St. Maarten donated US \$10,000 to Milton Peters College's computer science class to support the school's education programmes on cyber-crime, get students involved in a nationwide anti-cyber-crime campaign and enhance cyber-awareness.

-- Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs updated Parliament on the Mutual Regulation signed between St. Maarten, Curaçao, Aruba and the Netherlands, which she called a partnership where "St. Maarten has continuous ownership over the reforms that have been agreed upon and gives direction to the way in which these are implemented." Its focus is establishing and amending country packages of reform measures, their implementation agenda, action plans and report. Implementation falls under the Ministry of General Affairs, guided by the Secretary General Platform in collaboration with the Temporary Work Organisation.

-- To encourage responsible behaviour during Carnival, police and the Prosecutor's Office instituted "Pay or Stay": anyone caught committing an offence and issued a fine could opt to pay the fine or serve time in jail.

-- In appreciation for going above and beyond during



Four new passenger boarding bridges equipped with the latest technology were installed at Princess Juliana International Airport. The plan was to use them only for departing passengers in the first phase and for arriving and departing passengers in 2024.



Thousands of revellers, some dressed as priests, Egyptians or prisoners and others in pyjamas or tutus, took to the road for J'ouvert after a four-year hiatus.

the pandemic, Minister of Education Rodolphe Samuel shared the Council of Ministers' decision to grant teachers, management and support staff of all Division of Public Education schools three extra days off during the school vacation: July 31-August 2.

-- Coral Telecom and TelEm were targeted with distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, malicious cyberattacks to disrupt networks by overwhelming them with a flood of Internet traffic. French-side telecom services were also hit.

-- Civil Registry Department and Immigration and Border Protection Services staff were trained by the Koninklijke Marechaussee to identify fraudulent documents, including security features and printing techniques. Police had earlier warned about the circulation of false insurance documents.

-- The government announced it would invest US \$15 million to expand the national sewage network and \$1.76 million to complete the Dutch Quarter Sewage Project. Co-financing of \$10 million was requested from the World



An Ubersoca Cruise passenger had his lower right foot severed by water taxi propeller blades when he was sucked under the back of the boat while trying to swim to it.

Bank Trust Fund and loans were planned for the rest.

-- After months of wrangling, justice workers who accepted such were given a 25% advance payment in relation to the memorandum

of understanding (MoU) of 2019, new salary scales, function book and overtime regulation to be applied until the legal position regulation was enacted. This brought to an end the Police Force "go-slow".



St. Maarten and United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) established a cooperation framework to implement UNOPS social development projects in St. Maarten with a UNOPS office in Philipsburg. Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs (centre) and UNOPS Chief Finance Officer Lilian Nyang'aya (centre right) displayed the agreement.



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Group-1 pupils got a peek into the life of a firefighter, touring the Fire Department building, riding on a fire truck, using a fire hose and learning about the "Jaws of Life".



Damaged badly by Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, the Courthouse was reopened after extensive renovations to its roof, library, wooden floors and Flamboyant Room. Silent for decades, the tower's carillon began making music again and the spire's pineapple, a sign of hospitality, was polished.

MAY

Some political parties, such as the National Alliance (NA) and the Unified Resilience St Maarten Movement (URSM) kicked started their campaigning for the upcoming elections with launches and unveilings in May giving the public an insight into some of the candidates that can be expected on political slates. This and other issues made the news in the month of May.

--The spotlight shone on four labour heroes who worked tirelessly on improving the rights of workers and workers' organisations for Labour Day, Monday, May 1. Receiving the Most Historic labour award was Raymond Jessurun, while the Most Impactful award went to Windward Islands Civil Servants/Private Sector Union (WICSU/PSU) President Sharon Cangieter and "The Spirit of Labour" award went to Velda George Myler. Special award recognition from the Windward Islands Teachers Union (WITU) went to Glenda Mussen and George-Myler.

--The streets of Philipsburg were transformed into a spectacular sea of colours and excitement as revelers snaked their way through the streets gyrating to en-

ergetic music, smiling, posing for photos and having an all-round good time for the Grand Carnival Parade on May 1, and Second Day Parade "Jamrade" on May 2. At the close of the two days of revelry, "Island Revelers" by troupe leader Dylan Paul came ahead as Best Troupe, for the 2023 Carnival Parade, while Brandon Joseph from the Survivors Troupe won the Best Individual Costume category. Joseph's costume, themed "Glory" was an attractive costume of bright pink, purple and yellow.

--Two years after initiating the process to become a member of the Caribbean Reparations Commission (CRC), the One St. Martin (One SXM) Association was formally admitted as an associate member. The announcement was made in a press statement in May.

--The lifeless bodies of a man and a woman, possible victims of human smuggling, were discovered in Guana Bay. Several personal items were floating nearby one of the victims.

--Surgeon Dr. Luc Mercelina was elected leader of the URSM party and Chris Wever elected as the party's deputy leader during a well-



Interim Director for the Directorate of Foreign Relations Patrice Gumbs (left) and Prime Minister and Minister of General Affairs Silveria Jacobs (right) during a press conference in May in which they announced the changes to the borderline between Dutch St. Maarten and French St. Martin



A devastating fire in Dutch Quarter in May destroyed several homes in the area displacing a number of families, who later received assistance from a number of groups.

attended party launch in May. The party also elected its board and unveiled some of its candidates. Members of the party's board were also elected: Brenda Brooks (president of the board); Colomario Hennis (Treasurer); Veronica Jansen (Secretary) and Josianne Fleming-Artsen and Stuart Johnson (board members).

--The National Alliance launched its election slogan "We are one" and its Youth Alliance logo "We are Next" during an event at the Lion's Civic Center in Sucker Garden in May.

--After nine years of deliberations, the French and Dutch agreed to changes to the borderline between Dutch St. Maarten and French St. Martin, with the French gaining water rights in a section of Oyster Pond including jurisdiction over Captain Oliver's Restaurant and Marina, while the Dutch

gained 7,109 square metres in land mass over several border points. The changes will not affect the current square mileage in Dutch St. Maarten (16 square miles) and French Saint Martin (21 square miles).

--The building of Philipsburg Jubilee Library (PJL) caught on fire in May. The Fire Department deployed two trucks to the location at the east end of the capital and had the fire under control within hours.

--Bob Post, who has extensive experience in the financial industry, was appointed Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of Princess Juliana International Airport (PJIA), it was announced in May. His appointment was effective as of April 25, 2023.

--Dr. Moises Da Costa Gomez University of Curaçao (UOC) organised the first-ever moot court exam for four St. Maarten law school students at the courthouse in Philipsburg. For one of the students, Valya Pantophlet, passing this examination also meant that she is St. Maarten's first-ever law school graduate from the university's bachelor of law programme. Moot court is part of the university's bachelor programme during which students prepare and present a court case to a panel of judges.

--Dr. Delroy Pierre and wife Dr. Yadiria Boston, from



St. Maarten law school students Valya Pantophlet (left) and Vincent Boetius (right) pleading before an audience at the renovated "Flamboyant Room" in the Courthouse of St. Maarten.



Carnival splendor: Brandon Joseph from the Survivors Troupe won the Best Individual category in the 2023 Carnival.



Two bodies were discovered in the water in May. Photo shows the body of the second victim, which was found on Guana Bay Beach.



Labour Day Awards: Sharon Cangieter (second left) accepts her award from Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs (third left), while WICLU President Claire Elshot (right) and Acting Head of the Labour Department Linda Frostson (left) look on.



National Alliance MPs and ministers at the launch of the party's election slogan "We are One" and its youth wing slogan "We Are Next" during an event in May.

St. Maarten were hooded at University of the Virgin Islands' (UVI) commencement ceremony on May 12. Both graduated with their PhDs in Creative Leadership for Innovation and Change from UVI. They were the first students from St. Maarten and the first married couple to graduate from the programme.

--Personnel of St. Maarten Police Force KPSM and the Fire Department responded swiftly to multiple reports of a significant fire at the top of Madrid Drive in Dutch Quarter in May to fight a blaze that had several homes in flames. Due to an unknown cause, fire broke out in one of the houses and spread rapidly and resulting in the destruction of about four neighbouring homes.

--The Central Bank of Curaçao and St. Maarten (CBCS) had submitted leg-

islation to St. Maarten and Curaçao for a basic bank account for citizens of both countries. CBCS St. Maarten's director Raquel Lo Fo Wong alluded to the legislation during a meeting of Parliament's Finance Committee in May, while discussing the introduction of the new Caribbean Guilden XCG. She said at the time that the financial inclusion of the new currency cannot happen without access to financial systems. "So, we have submitted legislation for a basic bank account to the government of both Curaçao and St. Maarten and they are now going through the legislative process and... we are stressing... that this happens prior to the introduction so that those who do not have the opportunity to change their funds, that they have a bank account that they could do that," explained Lo Fo Wong.

JUNE

From the resignation of Marcel Gumbs as the St. Maarten Representative of the Trust Fund Steering Committee; the breaking of the current record for "largest cocktail tasting event" and the colourful Flag Day celebrations, to the release of information on the number of Parliamentary seats that would be available for the 2024 elections, many issues made headlines in June. Here are some of the top ones.

--Former Prime Minister Marcel Gumbs resigned as the St. Maarten Representative of the Trust Fund Steering Committee. His resignation went into effect as of June 1, 2023. Gumbs tendered his resignation in a letter to Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs dated April 2, 2023. Gumbs was appointed to the Steering Committee by Ministerial Decree, dated June 8, 2018 and as of May 1, 2018, he was appointed by former Prime Minister Leona Marlin, as representative of St. Maarten in the Steering Committee of the Trust Fund. In his resignation letter, Gumbs said the Steering

Committee was meant to guide the projects and funding managed by the World Bank for the recovery of the country after Hurricane Irma. "It has been a distinct honour and privilege for me to have once again served my country in such a critical and significant role as the island began its reconstruction and recovery following the devastation of Irma," Gumbs said in his resignation letter.

--The number of Parliamentary seats for the January 2024 elections will remain at 15 and will not increase to 17. Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs made the announcement during a live Council of Ministers press briefing, noting at the time that a total of 58,477 persons had been registered in the country's Department of Civil Registry. Article 45 of the constitution states that Parliament shall consist of 17 members if the population amounts to more than 60,000 and no more than 70,000 persons. According to the Constitution, as the population increases, so can the number of seats in Parliament.

--Independence for St. Martin Foundation on June 13,

(St. Maarten's Flag Day) requested Parliament's approval and support for its proposal to have Philipsburg removed as the official name of the capital of St. Maarten and the town to be named Great Bay. The Parliament Committee of Constitutional Affairs and Decolonization (CCAD) acknowledged the need for the name change and announced it would work on this during a meeting on the topic. "The present name of our capital, Philipsburg, is insulting," said Nzinga Lake on behalf of the foundation. "We should not honour persons such as Mr. John Philips, who has an abusive past. Great Bay belongs to its people, past and present. We should ensure that all St. Maarteners and visitors fully embrace the renaming of our capital. Members of Parliament, with your support and stamp of approval, let's take back what is rightfully ours, our capital's name given by our ancestors and people: Great Bay."

--An investigation conducted by the Integrity Chamber into bidding procedures in government has found that there was non-compliance with bidding procedures and applicable laws and that the claims made in the notification of suspected misconduct were justified. The basis for the investigation was a notification of a suspected misconduct reported to the Integrity Chamber, which described the misconduct as a violation of, or non-compliance with existing bidding procedures within the Council of Ministers. "The Integrity Chamber concluded that the claims made in the notification of suspected misconduct were justified as there was insufficient compliance to the bidding procedure," the Chamber said in a press release issued in June.

--A celebratory atmosphere permeated the air in parts of Cay Hill on June 13, as pupils



National Alliance (NA) candidates on stage at Aleeez Convention Center during the party's "congress" in June.



Marcel Gumbs has resigned as the St. Maarten representative on the Trust Fund Steering Committee. Gumbs is pictured here (right) with from left: Former Dutch State Secretary Frans Weekers (representing the Government of the Netherlands) and World Bank Country Director for the Caribbean Countries Lilia Burunciuc (representing the World Bank) (file photo).



Officials amongst attendees at the celebration of the 38th anniversary of Flag Day at the parking lot of the Asha Stevens Hillside Christian School on June 13.

from several schools proudly waved their St. Maarten flags in commemoration of the 38th Anniversary of Flag Day held in the parking lot of the Asha Stevens Hillside Christian School. President of Parliament Sidharth "Cookie" Bijlani, Members of Parliament, Governor Ajamu Baly, Deputy Prime Minister Egbert Doran, Ministers, and other dignitaries were in attendance at the ceremony.

--Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs was retained as NA leader and VROMI Minister Egbert Doran announced as the party's deputy leader during the party's congress held at the Aleeez Convention Center in June. Doran replaced Rodolphe Samuel, the sitting Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport (ECYS) as NA Deputy Leader. An interim board was also put in place during the well-attended event. One of the highlights was the calling up of 19 NA candidates who graced the stage to the beats of live drumming and celebratory roars of applause from the audience.

--Cruise passengers and residents jointly broke the current record for "largest cocktail tasting event" to kick off the 2023 "St. Maarten Flavors" campaign during an event on June 15. In total, 483 participants simultaneously toasted and sipped their "Sweet SXM" cocktail provided by Caribbean Liquors and Tobacco at the Sharky's venue at Port St. Maarten. With this successful attempt organised by the St. Maarten Hospitality and Trade Association (SHTA), St. Maarten broke the Russian record of assembling 354 cocktail drinkers at the Wild Turkey Jazz Festival in Moscow on November 18, 2017.

--The World Bank-managed

St. Maarten Reconstruction, Recovery and Resilience Trust Fund (SXM TF) has for the second time approved additional funding of US \$19.5 million for the Emergency Recovery Project I (ERP-I). This brings the project's total allocation to US \$119.7 million. ERP-I will also be extended by 13 months, with a new closing date of December 31, 2025. The Project has contributed to St. Maarten's immediate emergency recovery needs after Hurricane Irma, with a longer-term vision to strengthen institutional capacity to manage resilient recovery and reconstruction.

--The Ministers of Justice of the Dutch Kingdom countries received the draft Code of Conduct for the Public Prosecution Service OM Carib during the Judicial Quadrilateral Consultation (JVO) held in St. Maarten in June. Ton Maan, the Attorney-General for Curaçao, St. Maarten, Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba, presented the draft Code to the ministers for their approval. The Code, when approved, will be in effect for the Office of the Attorney-General and the Prosecutor's Offices of Curaçao, St. Maarten, and the BES. The draft Code after its approval will replace the current version implemented in 2016.

--Voice of the Youth SXM Foundation (VOTY) founder Zulayka Peterson Zulayka Peterson unveiled the acquisition of a bus through the R4CR grant Round 5, during the foundation's 10th Rank Promotion Ceremony for its St. Maarten Youth Brigade programme. The event was held in May but the announcement was made in June. Alongside Youth Brigadiers, St. Maarten Police Force (KPSM) and VKS marched to recognise the organisation's value amongst the community and celebrate promoting members within the program. The bus would play a pivotal role in the uplifting programme for youth.



Attorney-General Ton Maan (second left) presents the draft OM Code of Conduct to Justice Ministers of Curaçao, St. Maarten and the Netherlands in June.



Cruise passengers and residents raise their glasses high as they toast with the "Sweet SXM" cocktail at Sharky's, at Port St. Maarten in June, breaking the record for "largest cocktail tasting event."

JULY

July was a month reflective of crime and punishment, with GEBE suffering another cyberattack, RBC Royal Bank reporting skimming incidents that affected some of its debit cardholders and the government of St. Maarten being ordered by the court to pay NAF. 1 million in damages for not following through with the St. Maarten Tax Transformation Project; and at the same time, proceeds from the "Larimar" corruption case involving former Member of Parliament (MP) Theo Heyliger were allocated for the Dutch Quarter Sewage Project.

--King Willem-Alexander's apology for the historical legacy of slavery, officially delivered on July 1, was deemed incomplete by Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs. Notably absent from the royal address, according to PM Jacobs, was a substantive discussion on the crucial matter of reparations. Four days following the apology, she underscored the significance of what follows the apology, emphasizing the need for tangible actions to redress

historical injustices.

--PM Jacobs articulated her concern, stating, "What is important for me is 'what comes after the comma'—to ensure that in all our actions, including our regular meetings, the Dutch Government remains cognizant of the issues they have apologized for. It is imperative that we are treated with equality, and the lingering vestiges of colonialism are systematically dismantled."

--Criticism also emanated from the One SXM Association, asserting that King Willem-Alexander failed the penitence test. The association vehemently rejected the notion that the perpetrator, in this case, the King and the Dutch Kingdom Government, should unilaterally determine the consequences for their acknowledged crimes against humanity.

--One SXM Association called upon the Dutch Kingdom to take decisive measures, advocating for the eradication of colonialism and an unwavering commitment to reparations and other forms of restorative justice. In their view, the responsibility for defining the redress for historical wrongs lies not with the perpetrator but with a comprehensive and inclusive process that involves acknowl-

edgment, accountability, and meaningful reparations.

--July was also dominated by discussions about a hefty bill for the government of St. Maarten. The Court ordered payment of a sum of NAF. 1 million (US \$554,862) in damages jointly to BearingPoint Management Consulting (BPMC) and Noesis Investment Management NV. The legal dispute centred around the St. Maarten Tax Transformation Project, initiated in August 2019 under the leadership of then-Finance Minister Perry Geerlings. Unfortunately, the project faced an abrupt halt following a change in the government.

--The situation escalated when BearingPoint and Noesis, having been left uninformed by the new Finance Minister, Ardwell Irion, for nearly a year, received a letter notifying them of the termination of negotiations on the ICT project. The Court, in its ruling, acknowledged that the damages incurred by the two companies could surpass the stipulated one million. Notably, BearingPoint and Noesis expressed a preference for the project over monetary compensation, urging Minister Irion to cease the ongoing tender process and instead award them the contract.

--Contrary to this appeal, Minister Irion declared on Wednesday, July 26, that the

government would comply with the court's decision to pay the specified amount of one million. A heated debate in Parliament ensued, whereby United People's party leader Member of Parliament (MP) Rolando Brison blamed the Democratic Party for the substantial financial blow to the government, which would have resulted from "questionable agreements executed under Sarah Wescot-Williams leadership." Brison described MP Wescot's comments on the BearingPoint issue as akin to "an arsonist calling the Fire Department after setting the fire." In a press release, The Democratic Party lashed back at Brison for his "disgraceful assault on one of St. Maarten's senior politicians", stating that "if you tell a lie often enough, you start to believe it yourself."

--In the aftermath of the March 17, 2022, cyberattack on GEBE NV, the utilities company acknowledged another significant cybersecurity incident, prompting an abrupt closure of its offices after detecting anomalies in its Information Technology system on July 18. This move, ostensibly to address a potential threat, left consumers without access to GEBE's services for two days. The company's response included stringent precautionary measures and an extended closure for comprehensive cybersecurity checks, citing the necessity of ensuring system integrity. Despite urging patience from clients, GEBE's lack of detailed explanations raised questions about transparency. The subsequent confirmation of a police complaint added complexity, highlighting potential vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure.

--On July 14, RBC Royal Bank reported the first of two skimming incidents in July targeting several debit cardholders in St. Maarten. The bank characterized the attack as a "coordinated and aggressive criminal effort,"



The Court concluded that it followed from the actions of Guana Bay resident Marlon Brooks (39) that he had full intent to kill Estika Halley (26) when he attacked her and stabbed her multiple times with a knife. The struggle ensued in front of Emerald Funeral Home in Cay Hill. Brooks cut Halley's throat and left his profusely bleeding victim to die. "It is a great miracle that the victim is still alive," the Court concluded. Brooks was sentenced to 16 years in prison.



The Central Bank of Curaçao and St. Maarten (CBCS) opened the doors of the St. Maarten office in Philipsburg to the World Bank to set up office there. Prime minister Silveria Jacobs (second left) symbolically handed the key to program manager for the St. Maarten Trust Fund Toyin Jagha (second right). The St. Maarten office is number 4 in the Caribbean, and number 21 in the Latin American region. It is the first office in a non-member country of the World Bank Group, which has offices in 143 member countries.

prompting immediate action. RBC swiftly responded by lowering the daily ATM cash withdrawal limit as a precautionary measure. Additionally, all affected clients were summoned to replace their compromised debit cards, signaling the severity of the incident.

--Windward Roads (WWR) has been assigned to the Dutch Quarter sewage project, utilizing funds from the Larimar case penalty. The Prosecutor's Office granted permission to allocate the re-

mainder of the US \$2 million fine to enhance the sewage line, following a request from the Ministry of VROMI. The Larimar corruption case, concluding in March 2020, saw former MP Theo Heyliger convicted for accepting bribes from consultant Ronald Maasdam, funded by Dutch construction companies. This strategic use of penalty funds highlights a commitment to community improvement and repurposing penalties for vital infrastructure projects.



After a remarkable tenure of twelve years, CEO of Winair Michael Cleaver retired on July 1. He is succeeded by Hans van de Velde, a seasoned airline specialist, who, according to the Supervisory Board of Winair, is poised to lead St. Maarten's national airline into an exciting future. Cleaver (right), seen her with his former Executive Assistant Nathalie Lambriex and Supervisory Board Member Hans de Jong, is leaving behind a legacy of operational excellence and transformative achievements.



Little Key, an islet in Simpson Bay Lagoon, will become a Nature Park. This was announced by VROMI Minister Egbert Doran, who explained that Little Key, despite its modest size of 2,500m2, harbours a diverse range of mangrove species. These serve as vital habitat for the spotted eagle ray, moray eels and young sharks, amongst many other types of fish, while the mangroves are also a nesting place for many birds.



On Emancipation Day, July 1, Dutch King Willem-Alexander formally apologised for the Netherlands' role in slavery and slave trading. "For the obvious lack of action against this crime against humanity, I ask forgiveness today, on this day, when together we commemorate the Dutch past of slavery," the King said, speaking at an event in Amsterdam. The King expressed hope that his words resonated with people from the Caribbean part of the Kingdom who carry with them the pain of gross injustice.

AUGUST

Politics dominated this month, with various politicians making their viewpoints known in a forceful manner concerning participation, voting booth curtains and the actual date of the forthcoming election. School also began, making it an exciting time for children after a hot, dry summer.

--Five months ahead of the January 11, 2024, parliamentary elections, the political landscape was marked by intense strategic moves. Theo Heyliger, the founder and former leader of the United People's (UP) party, persistently issued stern warnings over the span of a year to the current UP leadership, advising against participation in the upcoming elections. Unfortunately, UP leader Rolando Brison, backed by members such as Parliament Chair Sidharth 'Cookie' Bijlani and VSA Minister Omar Otley, dismissed Heyliger's counsel – a decision that became evident once the election date was officially set.

--On August 2, voicing his

dissatisfaction on SOS Radio with host Billy D., Heyliger likened the situation to a "hijacking" of his party, drawing vivid parallels to a hostile takeover.

--Publicly condemning MP Brison's call for removal of his wife, Grisha Heyliger-Marten, as Parliament Chair almost a year earlier, Heyliger characterized it as a "coup attempt," deeming it "very nasty." Consequently, on October 27, 2022, Heyliger-Marten resigned from UP, transitioning to an independent MP after her removal as Parliament Chair. Within short, she would emerge as a candidate for the Democratic Party in the imminent elections.

--On August 13, UP went into campaign mode. With independent Members of Parliament Chanel Brownbill and Akeem Arruindell "going green", having joined UP as candidates in the next general election, party leader Brison said his team is "moving up." "Make no mistake, the job I love the most is bringing people together," said Brison, addressing some 500 attendees of the

pre-election party conference in Alezee Conference centre in Madame Estate about his plans for the future. He pledged that he would challenge local banks and go after those liable for fraud at pension insurer Ennia, and other persons and entities "that have held this country hostage". Enough is enough, Brison said.

--Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs informed Parliament on August 17 that the Council of Ministers had approved the removal of the curtains from voting booths in an effort to curtail corrupt voting practices. Party for Progress MP Melissa Gumbs expressed satisfaction, as the proposal was her initiative. In September 2022, Gumbs had submitted a letter outlining her reasons for requesting that the Prime Minister amend the Kiesbesluit (Election Decree) so that the dark curtain that appears on the voting booth would be removed. "I am pleased that the proposal was approved in COM and now look forward to it continuing the legal process," MP Gumbs stated.

--The World Bank approved a US \$ 8 million grant that will exclusively focus on improving mental health services in St. Maarten. The Grant Agreement between the World Bank and the implementing partner, the National Recovery Program Bureau (NRPB) was signed on August 4. Under the project, a new facility for mental health care will be constructed to accommodate more patients in a safe, patient-friendly environment, NRPB announced. The project further seeks to enhance the national mental health system via enhanced service delivery, governance, and an improved mental health financing system.

--The Inspectorate of the Ministry of Public Housing, Spatial Planning, Environment and Infrastructure VROMI only takes action against violation of building permits after construction has started. The Inspectorate wrote this in reply to the request from Beacon Hill home owners to revoke the building permit granted almost two years prior to Sasha Management NV for a four storey apartment building. Despite an administrative appeal from neighbours, the owner of the company continued to advertise apartments for sale that do not comply with the design for which he obtained the building permit. In response to question, VROMI Minister Egbert Doran said he cannot stop pre-sale of real estate.

--A letter to Minister of Justice Anna Richardson high-



After a long summer break, students in St. Maarten returned to school on Monday August 7 with excitement and anticipation for the new academic year. Many schools had organised special activities to help pupils feel more comfortable in their new classrooms. Pictured are Asha Stevens Hillside Christian School pupils listening attentively to the founder of the school during the school's welcome programme.



An emotional farewell unfolded on August 6 as 28 local students departed St. Maarten to embark on their journey of higher education in the Netherlands. The atmosphere was laden with mixed emotions as students embraced their loved ones, bidding poignant farewells. Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports (ECYS), Rodolphe Samuel, was present at the airport and spoke to the departing students, offering words of encouragement and support before their departure.



On August 1, Minister of TEATT Arthur Lambriex talked about preparations for a new Market Place in Philipsburg. "With the current progress being made, construction work for a new Philipsburg Market Place is expected to start sometime in September 2023 and is expected to be completed before the holiday season and peak of cruise tourism," said Lambriex. However, five months' post-announcement, the official groundbreaking ceremony is yet to be declared, leaving the community awaiting the commencement of the much-anticipated construction.



NAGICO Insurances has its first woman at the helm. Almost ten years after joining NAGICO and functioning in several positions, Kyria Ali was appointed as the Chief Executive officer (CEO) of Nagico Holdings Limited. "Insurance has historically been a male dominated field, especially at the executive level, so this accomplishment is major," said Ali, who announced in an interview published on August 1 that she focuses on steering NAGICO to success.

lighting critical challenges plaguing the Customs Department was sent to The Daily Herald for publication mid-August. Customs workers expressed their concerns over salary discrepancies and a toxic work environment, citing the lack of a comprehensive and up-to-date function book as the cause of procedural hurdles in obtaining the tools they need to perform their duties effectively. Acting Head of Customs Franklin Bernadina responded in a letter to the media, a move that was deemed disrespectful by Customs officers who expressed deep disappointment by "the falsehoods" propagated by Bernadina. The Customs agents demanded resolve from the Ministry of Justice before August 23.

--The increase in fees for interviews on radio stations during election time is seen by Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs as "extortionary behaviour". Citing prices from US \$300 to \$500 an hour, the PM wondered whether regulatory bodies such as



Part of the 2 million euros Dutch Cultural Participation Fund for the Memorial Year of Slavery, which runs from July 1, 2023, to July 1, 2024, will go towards "Soualichi Stories", a project of Foresee Foundation aimed at keeping oral history alive. Soualichi Stories represent a treasure trove of salty, rich, courageous and beautiful tales passed down through generations via oral history and traditions. Foresee is among the first in the Dutch Caribbean to receive this funding. In photo from left are Claudette Forsythe-Labega, Ralph Cantave, Jose Sommers, Kevin 'Suppa' Petrona and Julia Grigg during one of their planning sessions.

Bureau Telecommunication & Post (BTP) can regulate this and allow for equal representation by all parties. Responding to a question from UP MP Rolando Brison, Jacobs said she believed that radio stations are public forums with community billboards, and noted that

one or two stations had made a time slot available which was rotated, giving all parties the opportunity to be heard free of charge. The PM made it clear that she was expressing her personal opinion. "It is something that I think we need to look at."

SEPTEMBER

Finances were in focus in September. The effect of the Ennia debacle on the 2024 budget caused a delay in that process, while negotiations with the Netherlands on debt refinancing continued to hinge on a solution to the Ennia issue. On the other hand, the Dutch First Chamber of Parliament approved a capital expenditure loan of over Naf. 60 million for St. Maarten.

--The submission of the 2023 budget amendments and the 2024 budget to Parliament in September faced a postponement, as revealed by Minister of Finance Ardwell Irion. The primary obstacle cited was the lack of clarity regarding the repercussions of the financial plunder of insurer ENNIA by its owner and shareholders.

--A significant portion of Ennia's pension policyholders in Curaçao, numbering more than 2,100 out of approximately 30,000, are residents of St.

Maarten. In response to the crisis, the government of St. Maarten committed to contributing to a resolution for the affected pensioners.

--Initially, the Netherlands had agreed to intervene and rescue Ennia by injecting 660 million euros as a loan to Curaçao. However, the Financial Supervision Board expressed reservations about this proposed solution, citing concerns that Curaçao's debt burden would escalate to the point where the island would have limited financial flexibility for other investments. Subsequently, Curaçao, in alignment with the advice from the Financial Supervision Board, opted to forgo the loan.

--The financial challenges faced by Curaçao, St. Maarten, and Aruba were exacerbated by their inability to repay the loans from the Netherlands, originally intended to mitigate the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prolonged negotiations between the three islands and the Netherlands centred on the conditions for extending the loans.

--The ambiguity surrounding the debt burden became a significant factor causing delays in the submission of the 2024 budget in St. Maarten. Moreover, the Ennia crisis further compounded the delays. In response to the situation, Curaçao, with the support of St. Maarten, chose to pursue a "settlement" for Ennia. This strategic decision entails Ennia discontinuing the acceptance of new customers and, with collaborative efforts from the governments of Curaçao and St. Maarten, ensuring that existing policyholders receive the pensions rightfully due to them.

--Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs clarified to the people of St. Maarten that Thursday had been determined as the optimal day for Parliamentary elections. The Unified Resilient St. Maarten Movement (URSM) had urged authorities to reconsider the decision to schedule the polls on a Thursday, advocating for the traditional Friday election day.

--In response, PM Jacobs emphasised that the decision to hold elections on Thursday, January 11, 2024, underwent thorough legal



St. Maarten Police Force KPSM deployed a Special Operations Team during the month of September to curb traffic violations and sale of drugs. "In a resolute effort to maintain law and order on St. Maarten, the team carried out a series of operations," KPSM informed, reporting inspections of several hundreds of cars and dozens of scooters. The team ventured into areas where drugs were suspected to be sold, including the school district.



Governor Ajamu Baly revealed on September 12 that Government is working on establishing a dedicated road fund as prescribed in the motor vehicle tax ordinance. "This should have significant positive impact on St. Maarten's infrastructure," the Governor said as he outlined the policies to be carried out by Government, guaranteeing that a portion of resources is consistently allocated for road infrastructure projects.



The Court of First Instance on September 22 found Karan Sidharth Bijlani (28) and Krystopher Carty (34) guilty of participating in a street race that left four seriously injured when Bijlani's grey Audi S3 crashed into a garbage truck on Bush Road around 4:45am Saturday, January 29, 2022. The high-speed duo each received a suspended six-month prison term on two years' probation and a two-year ban on driving a motor vehicle. They were jointly ordered to pay US \$31,211.77 in compensation to two victims.



A cross-section of well-dressed dignitaries gathered at the House of Parliament on Tuesday, September 12, to witness the opening of the 2023-2024 Parliamentary Year. The highlight of the event was the anticipated speech delivered by Governor Baly, outlining the policies and plans of the government for the coming year. It was Baly's first speech since taking office as Governor.

scrutiny. She explained that the choice to conduct elections on Thursday aligned with past practices, as previous elections were held on that day.

--Joint Court of Justice President Maurits de Kort and St. Maarten Chief Prosecutor Hieke Buist urged members of Parliament to debate and pass the draft Criminal Procedure code. St. Maarten's updated draft has been at Parliament since 2019. "It would be a shame if St. Maarten -- especially as a leader in the field of constitutional law -- does not respond properly to this," said De Kort, indicating that Aruba passed this piece of legislation and it will come into effect on January 1, 2024. Like St. Maarten, Curaçao is also lagging behind.

--Dean of Bar Association Caroline van Hees issued a call to the joint Court of Justice to speed up the process of delivering verdicts in appeal cases. There were 45 cases related to St. Maarten awaiting verdict when Van Hees held her speech during the installation of Gerben Drenth as judge in St. Maarten's Court of First Instance, on September 8.

--Eight years after the incidents that triggered a criminal investigation, suspended Member of Parliament Claudius 'Toontje' Buncamper and his wife Maria Buncamper-Molanus, the former Minister of Public Health, Social Affairs, and Labor VSA, found themselves back in court on September 4 and 5, seeking to appeal their convictions in the landfill bribery case. Dubbed the "Ruby case", the legal proceedings centre around the procurement process for the new management of the primary landfill on Pond Island. Despite being handed a 32-month sentence for seeking and accepting bribes, MP Buncamper maintains his innocence. Similarly, his wife, who received a 10-month prison term for complicity, steadfastly denies any wrongdoing. The appeal hearings aim to revisit the convictions handed down in this long-standing legal saga.

--On September 13, government-owned telecommunications company TelEm was ordered to pay more than US \$3.7 million in damages for wrongfully terminating a contract with the Is-

raeli multinational company MER Group to install fibre-optic cable infrastructure on St. Maarten. The Joint Court of Justice upheld of the international Court of Arbitration, which ruled in January 2022 that TelEm should have allowed MER more time to complete the project, after Hurricane Irma ravaged St. Maarten, including equipment MER Group had brought to the island. The Court found TelEm wrongfully exercised its bank guarantee.

--The Dutch First Chamber of Parliament gave its final approval for a capital expenditure CapEx loan of approximately Naf. 60.9 million for St. Maarten. Finance Minister Ardwell Irion announced the approval, stating: "After a six-month wait since Parliament's approval of the 2023 budget on March 31, we are thrilled to announce that the Eerste Kamer granted their final approval on September 26, for the CapEx loan." Irion said government was in the final stages of the process to receive the funding, bringing the country one step closer to executing crucial investments for the betterment of St. Maarten.

OCTOBER

Seniors were a distinct focus of October, with Senior Citizens Recreational Foundation hosting a lunch for seniors on International Day of Older Persons. Enhanced Living Foundation continued providing essential care to the elderly with boosted funding from Resources for Community Resilience. CPS called on the community to promote healthy ageing via exercise and a healthy diet, reminding that we are in the Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030; and the Ministry of Public Health, Social Development and Labour organised a symposium on the transition from active labour to retirement.

--Tropical Storm Philippe caused government and business closures, but after the green light was given to reopen, it brought torrential rains that flooded several

low-lying areas. GEBE had to cut power in St. Peters after high voltage lines became entangled in the high winds, resulting in a short circuit.

--Messages of unity, inclusivity and nation building were echoed in speeches by Governor Ajamu Baly, Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs and Parliament President Sidharth "Cookie" Bijlani at the 13th annual Constitution Day Commemorative Ceremony.

--Georgia State University (GSU) Professor Dr. Jonathan Gayles visited University of St. Martin (USM) to prepare for a student exchange in 2025, for GSU students in the Africana programme to immerse themselves in the life and culture of a black society outside the United States.

USM students will also be offered an exchange programme at GSU.

--Finance Minister Ardwell Irion signed an agreement to refinance the NAF. 316.4 million COVID-19 liquidity support loans that St. Maarten received from the Netherlands. Due on October 10, the loan was extended for at least a year, at an interest rate of 3.4%, despite no agreement on the EN-NIA debacle.

--Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs reported to Parliament that 90% of NV GEBE's lost records dating back to February 2021, prior to the cyberattack, had been restored, but GEBE was still navigating through largely manual processes.

--The Department of Community Development, Family and Humanitarian Affairs, Section Women's Desk, in collaboration with Leighloe, initiated a pilot project to give eight unem-



Personalities life-cast for the underwater Spirit of SXM Sculpture Park stood next to their sculptures; from left: Riselle Celestina, José Figueroa, Evita Henderson, Don Arndell and Amaris Richardson.



Singer Helen Hart, who passed away in Panama at age 67, was a dear friend to many and was paid tribute to during an evening of music, poetry and art.



A request for bids on 11,070 square metres of land between the Mullet Bay Towers and American University of the Caribbean School of Medicine was published by BSZE lawyers representing SunResorts. Finance Minister Ardwell Irion said the offer was to raise funds to pay off "huge debts", fund Sun Resorts' operations and transparently execute the property's sale.



Princess Juliana International Airport opened a Temporary Arrival Facility to include Immigration, Baggage Claim and Customs services.

ployed women sewing skills to generate income, with the goal to extend this to the wider community following evaluation.

--Minister of Public Health, Social Development and Labor Omar Ottley responded to 116 questions posed by civil servants represented by their unions, on his proposed healthcare reform initiative, the Sustainable Affordable Access to Health Care Act.

--The island was largely spared the wrath of category one Hurricane Tammy, but cruise and cargo vessel traffic were interrupted, there was some flooding and schools were temporarily closed.

--The Ministry of Finance hosted a session to introduce the new e-wallet app SEN, by CX Pay. A play on the colloquial St. Maarten word "send", SEN is for sending money from one user to another. Called "a hybrid between Cash App and Venmo", it bridges the gap between traditional banking and the unbanked population.

--Teen Times and Caribbean Alliance Insurance launched the "Go Solar!" initiative to promote solar

power education in elementary schools, starting by giving Marie Genevieve de Weever School solar-powered security lights. The aim is to shape young people's mindset towards more sustainable and eco-friendly choices.

--The Ombudsman Bureau reported handling 341 complaints in 2022, with 37 resulting in a report. Topics included civil cases, labour

disputes, police, immigration, tax, rental disputes, Domain Affairs and not knowing where to go with an issue.

--The government said it would address leaking roofs, mould, no air conditioning and poor Internet at Oranje School, following a sit-out by teachers and pupils protesting conditions that were ignored for years.



To be installed at various schools, 20 UNESCO-sponsored recycling bins arrived in St. Maarten, heralding a new chapter in sustainable waste management – a joint initiative of Green Dream Projects and Environmental Protection in the Caribbean.

NOVEMBER

Politics was in the air in November as a number of political related events occurred including Nomination Day (Postulation Day), Endorsement Day, the start of distribution of voting cards as well as the announcing of some key statistics related to elections.

--Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) Department of St. Maarten Medical Center (SMMC) marked a milestone when it celebrated its five-year anniversary. The clinic opened in 2018 and consists of fifteen rotational Specialists from three top clinical hospitals in the Netherlands: Ziekenhuis Gelderse Vallei Ede, De Vijf Meren Kliniek Haarlem/Hoofddorp and Canisius Ziekenhuis Nijmegen, who provide ENT care to the

people of St. Maarten 24/7. The Specialists work on a rotational basis of 4-6 weeks at a time and all have their own sub-specialties making it possible for SMMC to cover all ENT pathology excluding oncological cases (cancer of the ear, nose or throat) which are referred abroad.

--Flanked by a squad of heavily armed Alpha Team officers, a shackled and blindfolded Marlon Brooks (39) was led into the Appeals Court in November and claimed he was innocent of slashing Estika Halley's throat and leaving her for dead in the early morning hours of July 31, 2022. Earlier this year the lower court sentenced Brooks to 16 years in prison for attempted murder. Thursday was the first hearing in Brooks' appeal of this verdict, but the date for the appeal trial is not yet known.



Brandishing machine-guns Alpha Team officers led Marlon Brooks, who is accused of brutally stabbing former beauty queen Estika Halley, to his Appeals Court hearing in Philipsburg Mutual Improvement Association (PMIA) hall in November.



The scene of the deadly shooting on the Simpson Bay Strip in November where a man lost his life.



Spectators of the S'maatin National Cultural Parade in November could not miss these flag-bearing moko jumbies (Photo by John Halley).

"I'm not the one who did it," Brooks told the panel of three appellate judges in November. In its verdict in July, the lower court considered it proven that Brooks had brutally injured Halley.

--There were a total of 22,553 eligible voters who were registered at the Department of Civil Registry at the close of the Voters Registry on October 23, for the 2024 parliamentary elections, Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs announced in November. Of the 22,553 voters, 10,647 are male and 11,906 are female.

--The colour teal has been added to the decree outlining the colours that political parties can be assigned for the upcoming parliamentary elections. The colours in the decree are now red, yellow, blue, green, brown, cyan, black, white, purple, magenta, orange, grey, beige, teal and gold.

--The Department of Civil Registry began the distribution of voting cards in November first at the Government Administration Building as of November 25, and continuing until December 1, and later on, cards that were not collected, were delivered by post to persons homes as of December 4.

--Eight political parties submitted their lists of candidates to the Central Voting Bureau at the Legislative Hall in Parliament for Nomination Day on November 22. In the meantime, the four political parties whose candidate lists needed to be supported by 134 eligible voters during Endorsement Day on November 23, met the endorsement requirements. The final count for endorsements showed that Unified Resilient St. Maarten Movement (URSM) had obtained 267 signatures; Nation Opportunity Wealth (NOW) 227 signatures; Empire Culture Empowerment Association (ECE) 162 signatures

and Democratic Party (DP) 159 signatures.

--Police arrested the mother of a six-day-old baby after she threw the child over the balcony of a house in Dutch Quarter in November. The little boy was severely injured, but according to the latest report at the time he was alive. The mother of the baby was being treated by a psychiatrist of the Mental Health Foundation (MHF). Police were trying to find an answer as to what led the woman to throw her child over the balcony. The extent of the baby's injuries were not revealed.

--The Court in First Instance found that Olivier Arrindell's accusations of corruption and other defamatory statements about Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs and Minister of Public Health, Social Development and Labour VSA Omar Ottley infringe on the personal privacy of both ministers. Arrindell was ordered by the Court to rectify his statements within 24 hours after the verdict in a video or audio recording to be handed to the attorneys of the PM and Minister. For each time that Arrindell - after the verdict at 8:30am on Friday, November 24, 2023 - violate the ban on making defamatory statements in public, the judge imposed a penalty of US \$10,000, up to a maximum of \$1,000,000. Arrindell had made public his intention to appeal the cases.

--In a splash of colour seldom seen outside the island's two Carnival seasons, many considered the S'maatin National Cultural Parade in November to be the highlight of the 64th annual St. Martin/St. Maarten Day celebration. The parade featured dozens of cultural groups, national associations, and primary school troupes clad in flamboyant traditional wear and elaborate cultural costumes. They made their way from L.B. Scott Road to Jocelyn Arndell Festival Village in front of hundreds of spectators lining the route. There were even baton-twirling majorettes and flag-waving moko jumbies towering over the crowd on stilts.

--A man was shot multiple times on a busy Simpson Bay strip with people coming out of nearby nightclubs in November. The victim, G.E., was standing near a car when he was shot. He collapsed on the spot. Officers who arrived on the scene found the male victim lying on the side of the road next to a vehicle. He had sustained multiple gunshot wounds and showed no signs of life.



Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) Nurse Lisa Warrington-Felix and Dr. Wong Chung preparing for a procedure at SMMCs ENT Department which marked five years of operation in November.



A section of the crowd at the Government Administration Building for endorsement day held in November.



Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs and VSA Minister Omar Ottley outside the Courthouse after the verdict in the case against Olivier Arrindell.



Dr. Emiko Bird-Lake, made history when she was appointed the first female acting Governor in November, and Governor Ajamu Baly.

--Dr. Emiko Bird-Lake has taken the oath as the second Acting Governor for St. Maarten. Her position took effect after the acceptance of office ceremony held on November 22, in Parliament. Bird-Lake succeeded the late Reynold Groeneveldt, who served as Acting Governor until he passed away.

--Resources for Community Resilience (RC4R) an-

nounced that it had disbursed or committed US \$3.8 million to local projects and only had approximately \$200,000 left in the pot. Financed by the Government of the Netherlands via the St. Maarten Trust Fund, R4CR was designed to provide US \$4 million in seven rounds of grants (from July 2020 to December 2024) for social reconstruction projects post Hurricane Irma.

DECEMBER

In December an Integrity Chamber investigation into GEBE concluded that there is a general lack of compliance with integrity-related rules and procedures at the company with political influence being one of the contributing factors cited by the chamber as leading to this conclusion. Justice Minister Anna Richardson signed a new Ministerial Decree in which cou-

ples no longer have to get married in order for the legal partner to apply for a residence permit for the undocumented partner.

--Independent Member of Parliament (MP) Claudius "Toontje" Buncamper, who was suspended in early 2022 after being convicted of corruption, was given the same 32-month prison sentence on appeal.

--Considering it proven that Frans Richardson (55) accepted bribes totalling US \$94,800 and abused his position as a MP, the solicitor-general asked the panel of three appellate judges to sentence the former leader of United St. Maarten Party (US Party) to seventeen months in prison and order him to pay almost NAF. 193,000 in criminal proceeds.

--Two armed men were caught after robbing a jewellery store in the Old Street area on Saturday in broad daylight. Around 2:00pm the St. Maarten Police Force KPSM Central Dispatch received several calls about two masked individuals



Government officials, tourism stakeholders, locals and visitors gathered on Front Street Friday evening to witness the inauguration of St. Maarten Tourism Bureau's (STB's) new offices in the St. Joseph Building.

having entered the store.

--A ground-breaking collaboration between the government of Dutch St. Maarten and the Collectivité de Saint-Martin was formalised with the signing of a memorandum of understanding at the Government Building in Philipsburg.

--On December 5, 79 MPs left the Dutch Second Chamber of Parliament following the recent elections. Jorien Wuite, former St. Maarten Minister Plenipotentiary and first-ever Dutch MP of St. Maarten descent, was one of them.

--St. Maarten/St. Martin Alliance For Equality (SAFE SxM), LGBTQ advocacy group, addressed concerns regarding comments circulating on social media that suggest promoting LGBTQ rights and including sexual diversity in the curriculum equates to imposing non-heterosexual orientation on minors.

--The Court of First Instance GEA has determined that the Central Bank of Curaçao and St. Maarten (CBCS) is not obligated to amend press releases concerning Nina Ansary, daughter of entrepreneur Hushang Ansary, in the EN-NIA case. The court's ruling comes after summary proceedings initiated by Ansary against CBCS in September.

--Dutch National Ombudsman Reinier van Zutphen is calling for more direct action from the Dutch government to support the people in the Dutch Caribbean, many of whom are still living in poverty.

--Eleven nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and individuals were awarded by the Ministry of Justice at a thanksgiving holiday gathering themed "A Night of Thanksgiving" at Paradise Event Hall in Cay Hill.

--Between May and Au-



A total of 19,479 voting cards for the January 11, 2024, general elections have arrived at Postal Services St. Maarten (PSS NV) in Philipsburg, Management announced.



St. Dominic High School's International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) has announced a collaborative initiative with Elia's British School of La Nucia in Alicante, Spain.

gust 2022, Lathasha Mills (43) stole more than US \$115,500 of taxpayer money when she was head cashier at the Receiver's Office.

--Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs and Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations, Yoka Brandt, discussed their commitment to a further collaboration for an inclusive foreign policy of the Kingdom and of St. Maarten.

--A police officer stationed in Simpson Bay saw a man jump off the Simpson Bay Bridge landing in the perilous waterway and boat lane between the sea and the la-

goon, near the Coast Guard station.

--The Joint Court of Justice on Monday found police officers Igmur Woodley and Virginia Maxwell guilty of pressuring a local businessman to pay US \$7,500 in exchange for deleting information about him uncovered in an official investigation.

--The governments of St. Maarten and Curaçao have reached an "outline agreement" to save the pensions of roughly 30,000 policyholders of cash-strapped insurance company Ennia, the Central Bank of Curaçao and St. Maarten (CBCS).



Hundreds of children received a free gift and enjoyed a day of laughter and fun at the seventh annual Dance and Arts Dimensions Academy International 1,000 Gifts Giveaway event.



Representatives of the eight political parties that will be contesting the January 11, 2024, parliamentary election on Thursday selected the number on which they will appear on the election ballot as well as the colour of their party lists.



The St. Maarten Police Force has ramped up its initiatives in the Philipsburg area, targeting drivers who have left their vehicles in bus stops, intersections and on side-walks.

FRENCH SIDE YEAR IN REVIEW

2023 saw a period of mourning for the passing of former Mayor of St. Martin Albert Fleming, French-side sea rescue station President René-Jean Duret, and businessman Frédéric Erb, owner of Goldfinger. The year was marked by a crisis of confidence in the Louis-Constant Fleming Hospital management until a team from the Martinique hospital restored stability. Drinking water woes reached its zenith with a temporary shut-down in production caused by passing storms Phillipe and Tammy. Air Antilles went bankrupt until its partial takeover by the Collectivité, and protests were initiated against the French government's increase in the retirement age to 64. Unions raised security concerns for Collectivité employees being subjected to abuse, and infrastructure issues at Collège Soualiga disrupted many hours of class work.

JANUARY

French Prime Minister



The new Minister of French Overseas Territories, Philippe Vigier, was appointed to the position on July 20, taking over from Jean-François Carenco.



The late René-Jean Duret (right), President of French-side sea rescue service SNSM, greeted here by Préfet Vincent Berton, passed away in France on July 7.

Élisabeth Borne announced 3,000 additional Police and Gendarmes will be recruited in January 2023 to reinforce security and better fight crime, in the overseas territories as well thanks to an increased budget of 9.6 billion euros.

President Louis Mussington and his services received the firm "Études, Observation, Habitat et Statistiques" (EOHS), holder of the public contract of implementation, to officially launch the Local Housing Programme of St. Martin (Programme Local de l'Habitat (PLH) de Saint-Martin).

Relatives of the victims of the 1972 air crash that took the lives of 12 passengers from St. Martin and Guadeloupe obtained some measure of closure when a memorial stele was unveiled on the roundabout opposite the former St. Martin Tourism Office. Until now, no formal tribute had been paid to the victims of the air crash.

The Orient Beach restaurant Orange Fever won the Chamber of Commerce CCISM's first "Disability and Business" (Handicap et Entreprise) competition for its amphibious wheelchair called "Tiralo

2" to assist handicapped people access the water and have an "as close as possible" swimming experience.

The long-awaited inauguration of the post office branch (La Poste) in French Quarter took place at Les Hironnelles Residence with a ribbon cutting performed by elected officials and representatives of La Poste.

Teachers' unions from primary and secondary schools as well as the private and public sectors gathered in front of the Préfecture to protest the government's intention to raise the minimum retirement age to 64. France and the overseas territories were undergoing a massive mobilisation against the pension reform project.

FEBRUARY

The services of the Collectivité led by Vice-President Bernadette Davis met with the State services and Préfet Vincent Berton to discuss the continuing problem Sargassum weed invading the coastal areas of the French side and its consequences on tourism, the economy and the local population.

A tri-partite agreement was signed between the Collectivité, Conservatoire du Littoral and the Sandy Ground association Nature is Key, for the clean-up, protection and management of the small island in the Simpson Bay Lagoon, Grand Îlet.

President Louis Mussington received the President of the Guadeloupe Region, Ary Chalus, on Monday, February 13, as part of the reinforced partnership the two territories are implementing for the benefit of training and skills development of the people of St. Martin.

The Jouvert Morning parade was stopped by the Gendarmerie at around

5:30am after two women spectators were caught in the cross fire when gun shots rang out among on-lookers involved in a fight towards the end of the procession at the Louis-Vanterpool Stadium.

President of the Collectivité Louis Mussington expressed sadness at the passing of businessman Frédéric Erb, owner of the Goldfinger store.

MARCH

On Thursday, March 8, the Collectivité received President of the University of the West Indies, Michel Geofroy and his delegation. The main objective for the Collectivité is to offer young people from St. Martin the possibility of continuing university studies on their own territory and stem the exodus to other university destinations.

The Collectivité announced six demolition projects have been scheduled as part of the post-Hurricane Irma urban renewal and reconstruction programme.

The Farm4You aquaponics project had its grand opening and tour in Agrément giving attendees an insight to creating an energy efficient, natural, healthy and sustainable food source for the island.

A change of contractor and a re-start on the bidding process were the reasons for the delay in completion of the ferry terminal remodeling, Port Director Albéric Ellis disclosed. The ferry terminal on the waterfront was originally estimated to be completed in the first quarter of 2022.

A ceremony was held in Grand Case Beach Club to present diplomas to the nine candidates who had all passed with flying colours the exam Certificat d'Aptitude au Comman-



The body of the late Mayor of Saint-Martin Albert Fleming lies in state in Hotel de la Collectivité during the wake organised in his memory prior to the funeral.



The Commercial Court of Guadeloupe declared Air Antilles and its parent company CAIRE in compulsory liquidation with a two month continuation period pending a bidding to take over the airline. The court subsequently validated the Collectivité and EDEIS bid to partially take over Air Antilles. (France-Antilles photo)

dement à la Petite Pêche CACPP to be professional fishermen.

The Louis-Constant Fleming Hospital management responded to reporting by certain media on the French side for what it called were "attacks" on the hospital's functioning and issued its own press release to counter the allegations.

Representatives from the two hospital unions Confédération Générale des Travailleurs de Guadeloupe (CGTG) and Union Travailleurs Action Sociale (UTS) reacted to the Louis-Constant Fleming Hospital Director allegedly claiming that "all is well" when according to unions that was far from the truth.

APRIL

A guided tour of the Le Beach Hotel renovation in Marigot for the media and elected officials provided the first real update on progress since announcement of the hotel's 30-million-

euro renovation by owner and majority shareholder Patrice Seguin in early February 2022.

The first officially-organised drag race on the Grand Case by-pass since June 2017 was organised by Association Moto Action du Nord (AMAN) and combined amateur and professional racing with heavy emphasis on road safety with workshops aimed at the youth.

Elected officials were invited to tour the Soualiga Farm in Colombier which has been declared in full conformity with European norms for its egg production, grading and packaging facility while a presentation of the French side's first official chicken slaughter house was also given.

The first stone was laid in French Quarter for a new multi-activity centre as well as a promenade area as part of the Collectivité's plan to beautify the area, improve

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FRENCH SIDE...continued from page 14

quality of life and provide activities for residents. Delivery of the two projects is on track for delivery at the end of this year.

President of the Collectivité Louis Mussington and his majority party Rassemblement St. Martinois- Alternative (RSM-A) marked one year in office using the occasion in Hotel de La Collectivité with the press in attendance to give a review of all the accomplishments and money spent in all aspects of the Collectivité's operations.

The Collectivité in conjunction with the Council for Security and Delinquency Prevention (Conseil Local de Sécurité et de Prévention de la Délinquance CLSPD) distributed free crash helmets to young people in Sandy Ground. The initiative to reduce fatal accidents continued in other districts throughout the year.

A symbolic first-stone-laying ceremony took place in La Savane for the future Collège 900 which replaces Soualiga Collège in Cul-de-Sac that was destroyed in Hurricane Irma in 2017.

MAY

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed at the Belmond La Samanna Hotel between the hotel and the Ensolus Think Tank to encourage more sustainable tourism, reduce energy (electricity) consumption and carbon emissions, and in general to respect the environment.



The first ever free diving competition organised by the Tainos Free Diving School and hosted by Belmond La Samanna took place successfully on September 3. (Robert Luckock photo)

Second Vice-President of the Collectivité in charge of the living environment (Cadre de Vie) Bernadette Davis visited the Robert Weinum High School to raise awareness among pupils about waste sorting. This is an initiative encouraged by the Collectivité to change behaviour towards a cleaner island.

The Collectivité decided to join Agence Caribéenne pour la Cybersécurité (AC-CYB) to strengthen the protection of its computer data against cybercriminals. The Executive Council validated this decision at its meeting on Thursday, May 11.

On the occasion of the visit of the President of

l'Association Laïque pour l'Education, la Formation, la Prévention et l'Autonomie (ALEFPA), Michel Caron, two buildings containing apartments were recently inaugurated, one in Friar's Bay and the other in French Quarter to house vulnerable persons.

The latest addition to France's Missions Locales, the Mission Locale de Saint-Martin, presided over by one of the youngest presidents, Raphaël Sanchez, celebrated its first year of activity. More than 350 young people rely on it for professional integration and their future in general.

St. Martin Tourism Office held a press conference in the Grand Case Beach Club conference centre to launch the first edition of its "Saint-Martin Friendly Cuisine" restaurant guide, a project that evolved from the highly successful 2022 Gastronomy Festival.

JUNE

Former Mayor of Saint-Martin Albert Fleming, who presided over the territory during the Commune era for 24 years (1983-2007), passed away on June 28. He was 86, and would have celebrated his 87th birthday this July. His passing prompted scores of tributes and condolence messages.

To ensure the safety of postal workers and combat drug trafficking through the post, the State and La Poste Group signed an agreement to strengthen their partnership, the aim of which is to implement a national partnership concerning security of people, activities and products.

Group Buildinvest held an inauguration and cocktail party for the re-opening of Alamanda Beach Residence in Orient Bay Park on Friday, June 9, with contractors, owners, architects and elected officials present. It

was the last property in Orient Bay destroyed by the hurricane of 2017 that still needed to be renovated.

Members of the Economic Advisory Council (Conseil Economique Social et Culturel CESC) announced that Ida Zin Ka Ieu is the new President replacing Julien Gumbs whose four-year term came to an end.

St. Martin Tourism office hosted 73 international travel agents for the second edition of its "Fly In" programme which was implemented to replace the former St. Martin/St. Maarten Annual Regional Trade-show (SMART).

The Centre d'Excellence et d'Education par le Sport (CEES) and National Education signed a partnership agreement in the shared library of Collège Soualiga and the Lycée, an important step in formalising the objectives of both entities.

JULY

The passing of the late of Mayor of Saint-Martin Raoul Albert Fleming evoked profound sadness and loss but also the opportunity to celebrate a remarkable life, as was evidenced at the wake held at Hotel de la Collectivité and the funeral and tributes on the Marigot waterfront. Many speakers from both Dutch and French sides recalled their fond memories of "Monsieur Le Maire."

French-side sea rescue service SNSM announced the sad news that former President of the SNSM life boat station René-Jean Duret passed away in Gardanne, France on July 7 after a long illness. A private funeral with the family took place July 13 in Aix-en-Provence.

Three judicial investigations were opened following the unprecedented violence that erupted in Sandy Ground during the night of July 11 to 12 and again dur-



Parents of pupils at troubled Collège Soualiga protest outside the Préfecture over unusable classrooms due to water leaks and other issues that had not been properly addressed since the start of school back in September.



Construction in French Quarter for a new multi-activity centre and promenade area, part of the Collectivité's plan to beautify the area, improve quality of life and provide activities for residents is nearing completion. (Robert Luckock photo)

ing the night of July 13 to 14, the Gendarmerie stated.

Philippe Vigier (65) was appointed as the new Minister Delegate for Overseas France, replacing Jean-François Carencio. President of the Collectivité Louis Mussington expressed his regret at Carencio's departure. "Its thanks to Minister Carencio's interventions on behalf of the Collectivité of St. Martin at the inter-ministerial committee meeting that these measures were attributed to St. Martin."

Public bus transportation on the French side is set to become more convenient for citizens with re-organisation of bus routes, districts to be better served, more designated stops and a revised fare structure, it was disclosed at a press conference convened by Territorial Councillor Daniel Arnel.

The Collectivité divulged plans to turn Concordia into an 'eco-district'. As part of the national "Eco Quartier" programme the Collectivité plans to give Spring, Concordia, its own identity as an eco-district, eco-responsible, focused on sustainable development and improving quality of life.

The Collectivité announced various administrative de-

partments are in the process of being re-organised and renamed for more efficiency and to give better service to the population. The work has been entrusted to Director General of Services (DGS) Albert Holl and new Director of Human Resources, Nabila Benrachad, and will lead to production of a new organisational chart.

As part of "La Caravane de L'Emploi 2023", a Training Village for young people looking for courses to obtain qualifications or diplomas with a goal to embark on a professional path to access employment was organised in Galisbay on Friday, July 28.

AUGUST

Following the Air Antilles pilots and cabin crew strike that lasted from July 14 to August 2, Air Caraïbes cabin crew on the transatlantic service went on strike for higher wages and better working conditions.

The Commercial Court of Pointe-à Pitre-declared the group Compagnie Aérienne Inter Régionale Express (CAIRE), owner of

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Louis-Constant Fleming Hospital celebrated its 20th anniversary with a big party attended by elected officials. Many doctors, nurses, administrative staff and other workers were recognised for their loyalty and service.



Minister of Overseas Territories Philippe Vigier accompanied by Collectivité elected officials laid the symbolic first stone for a 12-million euro extension at the Louis-Constant Fleming Hospital. (Robert Luckock photo)

Air Antilles and Air Guyane Express, in compulsory liquidation with a two-month continuation period for a bidding process to find a new owner.

Regional health agency ARS installed an interim management team at the troubled Louis-Constant Fleming Hospital to temporarily replace Director Marie-Antoinette Lampis. The new director is Anne Calais, an assistant director from the Martinique Hospital who accepted the post with her team from July 17.

The Collectivité signed a contract with La Poste Antilles-Guyane to upgrade all street names and addresses on the territory to integrate them into the national data

base. The purpose was to eliminate confusing street names, and make it easier for emergency services to find addresses quicker.

Demolition of the building housing the Lolo's on the Marigot waterfront began following demolition of the former Mini Club restaurant on Boulevard de France. The work was expected to take eight weeks to complete.

Thanks to the agreement with Conservatoire du Littoral, the Collectivité, and Association Nature is Key from Sandy Ground, Grand Îlet in the Simpson Bay Lagoon is in the process of becoming an educational public park.

The primary shelter in St.



15 trainee flight attendants show off their diplomas after passing a month-long course to obtain the European Cabin Crew Certificate, or CCA (Cabin Crew Attestation). This first training course financed by the Collectivité's Pass Formation scheme began, Monday, September 4.



The movie Chokehold about domestic violence made by French-side resident producer/director Joel Ayuk (right) was the first full-length local feature film to have a premiere at Caribbean Cinemas (Megaplex) on November 25. In the photo is Jamaican lead actress Sherando Ferril. (Robert Luckock photo)

Martin for people in distress, Le Manteau, officially inaugurated emergency accommodation for 10 men on Tuesday with a visit by Préfet Vincent Berton and Secretary-General Fabien Sésé. The shelter operates under the umbrella of Association Laïque pour L'Education, la Formation, la Prévention et L'Autonomie (ALEFPA) since 2021.

French-side carnival committee (Festivités Carnavalesques de Saint-Martin FCDSM) recently elected a new board under the leadership of Luciana Raspail to usher in an exciting new chapter for the annual carnival festivities.

Préfet Vincent Berton advised the population to avoid the Sargassum areas in Cul-de-Sac Bay due to very high levels of hydrogen sulphide (H2S) recorded there. On August 24, the latest measurements showed very high levels of hydrogen sulphide (H2S).

President of the Collectivité

Louis Mussington disclosed during his Sandy Ground Fête speech a number of measures will be taken for Sandy Ground as a result of meetings with the business community and inhabitants in the aftermath of the violence in Sandy Ground on the night of Tuesday, July 11 and morning of July 12.

In consultation with the Territorial Police and the anti-delinquency council, five police officers who are themselves from Sandy Ground, will be stationed in the district along with two Gendarmes. The aim is to promote social cohesion and dialogue with inhabitants.

SEPTEMBER

The first free diving championship organised by the Tainos Free Diving School took place successfully offshore from the Belmond La Samanna Hotel with about a dozen free divers participating, mostly students from the school, from fifteen who registered.

The Collectivité decided to bid for a partial takeover of defunct Air Antilles in partnership with the EDEIS group, the management company of Grand Case Airport. Bids were due to be submitted by September 1.

The Commercial Court of Pointe-à-Pitre subsequently validated the offer to take over the assets of Air Antilles by the consortium comprising the Collectivité of St. Martin and EDEIS.

Fifteen young women embarked on a month-long course to obtain the European Cabin Crew Certificate, or CCA (Cabin Crew Attestation). This first training course financed by the Collectivité's Pass Formation scheme began, Monday, September 4.

The Micro Folies mobile culture kits and digital mu-



The Children's Unity Parade with 14 schools participating celebrated the first anniversary of the Unity Flag being officially recognised by the two respective governments as a cultural symbol of unity and identity. (Robert Luckock photo)



The issuing of free crash helmets to the youth in all districts is a continuing initiative driven by the Collectivité and Conseil Local de Sécurité et de Prévention de la Délinquance (CLSPD) in an effort to reduce fatal two-wheeler accidents.

OCTOBER

seum were inaugurated at the Aline Hanson School in Sandy Ground in the presence of Préfet Vincent Berton, Collectivité officials, Vice Recteur Harry Christophe, and representatives from Direction des Actions Culturelles (DAC).

Préfet Vincent Berton and President of the Collectivité Louis Mussington and their respective delegations toured the projects managed by Semsamar. From the 600 and 900-pupil secondary schools to the Promenades de Quartier d'Orléans and renovation of the Gendarmerie barracks. Work is on schedule.

Union leaders at Hotel de la Collectivité demonstrated over security issues affecting employees. They were highly concerned over physical and verbal assaults on Collectivité employees that took place in recent weeks, the latest being an attack on an employee on September 28. The unions called for a complete revision of security.

Parents of students at Collège Soulaiga gathered Tuesday morning in front of the Préfecture to demand

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The Micro Folies mobile culture kits and digital museum were inaugurated at the Aline Hanson School in Sandy Ground in the presence of Préfet Vincent Berton and Collectivité officials. The kits are due to be shared between the schools. (Robert Luckock photo)

FRENCH SIDE...continued from page 16

answers from State services after complaining of numerous malfunctions at the Collège that have resulted, parents said, in students losing 104 hours of study since September.

The final demolition phase of the remaining buildings housing the former traditional lolos on the Marigot waterfront is imminent, leaving a vacant space that will in the future be filled with a new project in keeping with new waterfront development plans.

The 15 young candidates who embarked on a training course to become flight

attendants, received their diplomas at a ceremony in Mission Locale. In attendance to present the certificates were Secretary General of the Préfecture Fabien Sésé, President of Mission Locale Raphaël Sanchez, and Territorial Councillor in charge of training and development, Martin Beldor.

Just a day after the Delegated Minister for Oversea France Philippe Vigier laid the first foundation stone for the 12-million-euro hospital extension, Louis-Constant Fleming Hospital organised a celebration party for its 20th anniversary. The

old hospital was formerly located on Rue de Fort Louis, Marigot, before the move in to the new building in Concordia on July 28, 2003.

La Poste is now offering postal services in the Hope Estate industrial zone in the Kar'Outf multi service shop to further strengthen its presence in St. Martin. It follows the opening of a post office branch in French Quarter at the end of last year.

NOVEMBER

The third edition of the Gastronomy Festival got underway following a press conference at Alamanda Residences in Orient Bay to introduce the 19 international chefs who will be participating.

Failure to obtain the definitive approval to operate the abattoir under regulatory health and safety conditions meant the facility has remained closed. The Préfecture was confident the necessary approvals would be obtained in 2024.

The movie Chokehold, the first full-length feature film made by local Producer/Director Joel Ayuk featuring a mix of local and international actors had its much-anticipated premiere at the Caribbean Cinemas (Megaplex) on Saturday, November 25.

Collège Soualiga finally received the green light to open classrooms Nov. 13 after the final inspections were carried out on the building by the Préfecture's security commission.

The top three positions in the four restaurant categories were announced by the visiting professional chefs. The 56 restaurants competing for the "Best Table of St. Martin 2023" were judged on a daily basis since the beginning of the festival for their menus containing this year's themed ingredient, Sorrel.

Chef Sebastien Landrin from the gourmet Italian



Blindfolded professional chefs judge the dishes of the four finalist chefs during the third Gastronomy Festival on the Marigot waterfront. Gourmet Italian restaurant Del Arti emerged winner of "Best Table of St. Martin" award out of 56 participating restaurants. (Robert Luckock photo)



The first regional conference on fishing sustainability took place December 12 with representatives from St. Martin, St. Maarten, St. Barths, Anguilla, Saba, Statia and St. Kitts. In the photo Dutch-side Prime Minister Silveria Jacobs talks during a panel discussion. (Robert Luckock photo)



Former astronaut Nicole Stott (left) and astronaut wrangler Christina Korp pose at Belmond La Samanna where Stott gave a presentation of her Space for Art Foundation and experience on two missions to the international space station (ISS). (Robert Luckock photo)



The economic, social and cultural council (CESC) Ida Zin Ka leu (second left) as its new president taking over from Julien Gumbs after his four-year tenure.



After a long absence Luciana Raspaill (second left) returned as President of carnival committee Festivités Carnavalesque de Saint-Martin (FCDSM) with familiar board members at her side.

restaurant Del Arti in Anse Marcel won the coveted "Meilleur Table de Saint-Martin" award as the curtain came down on the third edition of the Gastronomy Festival.

Canadian businessman Mario Di Palma was found guilty in the court of St. Martin on Thursday, November 23, in one aspect of

the Deldevert case, namely the Group's bankruptcy. He was found guilty of bankruptcy for failing to keep proper accounts and misappropriating assets of the local company he bought after Hurricane Irma.

Children from 14 schools took part in a parade to mark the first anniversary of the adoption of the Unity Flag as a cultural symbol for both sides of the island expressing identity and unity.

Belmond La Samanna Hotel hosted astronaut Nicole Stott over three days from November 28 to 30 where she brought a fascinating insight to her experience of working at the National Aeronautical Space Agency (NASA), and her two flight missions to the International Space Station (ISS) in 2009 and 2011.

DECEMBER

The popular free newsletter Faxinfo celebrated its 30th anniversary this year with an exhibition opening on December 1, at its offices in

Bellevue. The display shows how the newsletter evolved from its first edition on February 1, 1993, to today's sophisticated colour version, available at outlets all around the island.

The first conference on the sustainability of the local fishing industry (Assises de la Pêche) organised by the Préfecture on Tuesday in Anse Marcel brought together the islands of St. Martin, St. Maarten, Anguilla, and St. Barths, to take part in exchanges that could lead to future agreements, to discuss topics including preserving and managing fish resources, standardising regulations, and restructuring the industry in the face of climate change and coastal erosion.

Java Restaurant on Grand Case Boulevard on December 9 hosted the musical debut of Sacha Mussington (16) an emerging and gifted talent who sang in front of assembled print and broadcast media, her parents and invited guests.

SABA YEAR IN REVIEW

MARCH

JANUARY

--Commissioner Rolando Wilson presented the Saba Cultural Policy 2023-2030 to Dutch State Secretary of Culture and Media Gunay Uslu during her visit to Saba.

--Originally from Aruba, educator Jessica R. Besse-link became the new Principal of Saba Comprehensive School (SCS).

--European Union (EU) Head of Delegation René van Nes signed a 4.1-million-euro financing agreement to support Saba's renewable energy infrastructure.

--The Executive Council approved a pilot to support local animal husbandry and fisheries. As part of this six-month project, livestock owners can apply to have shipping cost and the ABB general spending tax reimbursed for the import of feed and hay, as well as the import of livestock and chickens.

FEBRUARY

--International marine conservation organisation Mission Blue recently declared Saba and the Saba Bank a "Hope Spot" in recognition of the ongoing efforts to ensure long-term sustainability and health for the island's waters. Saba is the first Hope Spot in the Dutch Caribbean.

--The Executive Council approved plans to renovate Princess Juliana Sports Field in The Bottom, with the funds coming from the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. As part of this project, a number of improvements were made, such as repainting the walls and woodwork, installing a new emergency exit, creating more storage, expanding the women's restroom and a general thorough cleaning.

--The Court of First Instance in Bonaire sentenced a Saba resident to seven years in prison for the attempted manslaughter of his ex-girlfriend.

--Three archaeologists excavated the construction site of the new Saba Comprehensive School (SCS) building in St. John's. They found artefacts from the late seventeenth to the eighteenth century, including ceramics and glass bottles. The team also discovered an early 20th century grave of a newborn child.

--The new Island Council was installed, comprising PEP members Saskia Matthew and Hemmie van Xanten, as well as WIPM members Rolando Wilson, Elsa Peterson and Vito Charles. The Executive Council was made up of WIPM Commissioners Bruce Zagers and Eviton Heyliger.

--Windward Islands People's Movement (WIPM) won the Island Council elections, securing three seats. The new Party for Progress, Equality and Prosperity (PEP) won two seats. Exactly 1,040 valid votes were cast for the Island Council, of which 617 went to WIPM and 324 votes for PEP. No seats went to the blank list of Dave Levenstone, which received 95 votes, and the new Saba Caring People Party of Enrico "Cuchie" Klaber, which got four votes.

--WIPM was the only party that contested the Electoral College election and got all five seats.

--Per January 1, 2027, the number of Island Council members for Saba will be increased from five to nine. The number of commissioners will also go from two to three on that day. Dutch State Secretary of Kingdom Relations and Digitalisation Alexandra van Huffelen confirmed this in a letter to the Dutch First Chamber of Parliament.

--The new Island Council was installed, comprising PEP members Saskia Matthew and Hemmie van Xanten, as well as WIPM members Rolando Wilson, Elsa Peterson and Vito Charles. The Executive Council was made up of WIPM Commissioners Bruce Zagers and Eviton Heyliger.

APRIL

--Researchers from Wageningen University and Research identified a recent incursion of non-native iguanas, which formed a major threat to the island's endemic iguana population.

--A meeting between the public entity of Saba and management of RBC Royal Bank resulted in some concrete agreements, such as the elimination of the transfer fee for local pensioners who receive their pension on their RBC bank account. To avoid the fee, RBC agreed to process these transactions manually.



Loud cheering and applause erupted as King Willem-Alexander, Queen Máxima and Princess Amalia stepped outside the airport building on their arrival to Saba in February.

--The Saba Fire Department unveiled the newest fire truck added to its fleet, which immediately entered into service.

MAY

--The exemption list attached to the single-use plastics (SUP) ban was extended to July 1, 2024. The list was enacted to give restaurants, vendors, stores and other organisations time to prepare and adapt to the local environmental ordinance.

--The public entity of Saba and Caribbean Netherlands Pension Fund PCN signed a letter of intent to formally start collaboration towards a new childcare facility. With funding to the tune of \$3.1 million from the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, PCN will design, develop and build the new facility, which will then be leased to the public entity on a long-term basis.

--Saba's Electoral College voted for the Dutch Parliament's First Chamber. All five votes went to labour party PvdA Senator Jeroen Recourt.

JUNE

--Well-known American performer DJ Osoctic shot a music mix video in Saba, which surpassed five million views on YouTube by the end of the year. Invited by Saba Tourist Bureau, Osoctic donated his US\$2,500 payment to charities in St. Eustatius and Saba. For Saba, he chose the Saba Lions Club and its signature project, Meals on Wheels.



The fifth edition of Saba DOET in March saw 270 volunteers, spread between 19 projects, helping to improve and beautify the island.



Donated by Saba Tourist Bureau, the new name board for Major Osmar R. Simmons Museum in The Bottom was unveiled in January.

--Six future tenants of the new Under the Hill homes received a symbolic key during a brief ceremony. Commissioner Eviton Heyliger addressed the small gathering, which included representatives of the public entity of Saba, Dutch housing corporation Bazalt Wonen, main contractor Van Boekel, and local housing foundation Own Your Own Home Foundation.

JULY

--Saba marked the start of the Commemoration Year of the Slavery Past with a well-attended Emancipation Day event. There were a number of speakers and a range of performances.

--The Dutch Caribbean Coast Guard assisted 21 children and 2 adults, who were passengers on a sailing vessel that ran aground off the coast of Saba. The Coast Guard took the passengers to Fort Bay harbour. No injuries were reported.

--The Island Council approved the 2022 Year Report and the first 2023 budget amendment. Saba was again able to achieve

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The new Island Council went to Bonaire for a training in April. For three days, four of the five Island Council members participated in an introductory course about the functioning of the council and the role of its members.



The Dutch Inspectorate of Education conducted an inspection of the quality of Laura Linzey Day Care Center in January. According to the inspectorate, the day-care centre scored "outstanding" in four standards and "sufficient" in the other three.

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an unqualified audit opinion from independent auditor Ernst & Young. WIPM Island Council Members Elsa Peterson and Vito Charles submitted motions on the social minimum and adjusting civil servant salaries, which were subsequently passed.

--The public entity of Saba signed a deed of transfer for a piece of land with thereon a residential building with six apartments. This was the next step in the government establishing a permanent shelter for domestic violence victims.

AUGUST

--Based on the success of Saban pilots and alumni Jozua and Avant Baker, Canadian flight school Spectrum Airways Flight Training and Career College rolled out a special package to cater to the needs of its Caribbean students.

--A group of quick-thinking Sabans came to the rescue of four persons from Nevis whose boat had been drifting helplessly in the Caribbean Sea for an entire night.

--Saba's Juancho Irausquin Airport celebrated its 60th anniversary with the unveiling of a new green and yellow International Air Transport Association (IATA) logo.

SEPTEMBER

--Saba Cares Foundation held a groundbreaking ceremony for its new care facility in The Bottom, which will be built next to the current hospital building. The complex will also house a new nursing home.

--Sabans were conserving gasoline for several days after the island's only fuel supplier Big Rock Engineering refused to sell due to an excise tax dispute with Caribbean Netherlands Customs. Saba's government stepped in and mediated a solution. However, consumers had to pay extra at the pump to make up for Customs' tax calculation error.

--Saba Conservation Foundation (SCF) hosted the first-ever Saba Bird Fest, which ran from September 26-30.

OCTOBER

--Sea and Learn Foundation kicked off its 20th anniversary programme.

--The passing of Tropical Storm Philippe caused a shutdown of daily operations in Saba and portions of the island saw significant rainfall, with some areas receiving up to four inches. Schools were closed, and flights and ferry services were cancelled.

--Although Hurricane Tammy left little impact on Saba, heavy rainfall inundated the island. Several small rockslides were seen, particularly on Fort Bay Road.

NOVEMBER

--Various restaurants rolled out lobster-inspired menus and served locally-made rum during Saba's first Rum and Lobster Fest.

--Dutch Caretaker State Secretary of Kingdom Relations and Digitalisation Alexandra van Huffelen and Commissioner Bruce Zagers signed the new Saba Package Agreement for 2023-2027. This agreement contains the priorities, goals, and results concerning community welfare, economic development, climate and good governance.

--Only one in four eligible voters showed up at the polls to vote in the Dutch parliamentary election. Centrist party D66 claimed the top spot in Saba with 126 votes. Of these, 81 went to Dutch State Secretary of Kingdom Relations and Digitalisation Alexandra van Huffelen. The second largest party was left-wing alliance GroenLinks/PvdA with 35 votes, followed by right-wing liberal party VVD with 16 votes.

--Queen Wilhelmina Library celebrated its 100th anniversary with an open house.

--After the examination and confirmation of his credentials, Saba Fire Chief Julio Every was sworn in as the newest Island Council Member by Governor Jonathan Johnson. Every represents Party for Progress, Equality and Prosperity (PEP) on the five-person Island Council. He replaced PEP Island Council Member Hemmie van Xanten, who stepped down for personal and family reasons. Van Xanten had been notably absent in Island Council meetings since being re-elected in March.

--The Joint Court of Justice opened Saba's courthouse in an official ceremony on November 30. The building is located in Windwardside.

DECEMBER

--The official ceremony of the 48th annual Saba Day opened under the theme "An island of resilience, a heart of embrace". Local officials and invited dignitaries from St. Eustatius, St. Maarten, Bonaire, Aruba,



Saba Comprehensive School held a graduation ceremony for the class of 2022/2023 in November. Fabian Alkema was named valedictorian, after receiving five grade ones at the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examinations. Elizabeth Henry won the Salutatorian Award.



Alida Heilbron (left) told the slavery history of Suriname during a presentation by the Surinamese community at the official event on Emancipation Day.



The Saba flag being raised on Saba Day.

Curaçao and the Netherlands gathered at Princess Juliana Sports Field in The Bottom to listen to speeches and to be entertained by poetry, drama, dance, and song.

--Although Saba firefighters have been working in the new fire station at Juancho E. Yrausquin Airport

since July, the building's official inauguration ceremony was held on December 5 in front of a large crowd.

--With Christmas only weeks away, well-placed sources reported that at least eleven staff members of Sacred Heart School (SHS) and Saba Comprehensive School (SCS)

were laid off because of the schools' financial constraints. Saban parents and three members of the Island Council criticised the lay-offs.

--Saba is the most expensive island in the Caribbean Netherlands, according to a study by the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS).



A children's troupe parading through The Bottom during Saba Carnival 2023.



A squadron of Royal Dutch Marines visited Saba in September as part of the Dutch Ministry of Defence's comprehensive hurricane relief exercise. The marines also assisted in good causes while on island.

ST. EUSTATIUS YEAR IN REVIEW

JANUARY

--The social housing programme of the public entity St. Eustatius received significant support with the signing of a purchase agreement with Global Terminal Investment (GTI) for two plots of land in Concordia.

--The first baby born in 2023 was Kaylen Raishawn Amira. This healthy boy was delivered by midwife Diana Cumberbatch on January 14.

--Igmarr Fortin, the longest-serving firefighter in the St. Eustatius branch of the Caribbean Netherlands Fire Department, celebrated his 28th year of service.

--The public entity of St. Eustatius and the European Union signed a 2.9-million-euro sustainable agriculture agreement to ensure basic food security, create economic opportunities and in-

crease the island's resilience against external threats, such as extreme weather exacerbated by climate change. The programme will run from 2023-2026.

FEBRUARY

--Deputy Government Commissioner Claudia Toet officially signed the contract with Statia Construction for the revitalisation of Oranjobaaiweg.

--A 23-member delegation of the public entity of St. Eustatius travelled to St. Kitts to explore ways to identify opportunities for cooperation in tourism, trade and business development.

--The Public Health Prevention Clinic celebrated its first anniversary.

--King Willem-Alexander, Queen Máxima and Princess Catharina-Amalia landed on February 8, for a

one-day royal visit.

MARCH

--In the Island Council election, the Progressive Labour Party (PLP) emerged as the winner, securing three seats, while the Democratic Party (DP) won two. PLP received 979 votes out of the 1,751 ballots cast. DP received 663 votes and CDA-Statia got 117. For the first time, all political parties contesting the election were led by women.

--In the Electoral College election, DP won four seats and CDA-Statia received one seat.

--As a result of PLP's victory in Island Council election, the St. Eustatius Executive Council will consist of Reuben Merkman and Arlene Spanner-Schmidt. Representing PLP in the Island Council will be Rechelline Leerdam, Glenville Schmidt and Clyde van Putten.

--Per January 1, 2027, the number of Island Council members for St. Eustatius will be increased from five to 11. The number of commissioners will also go from two to three on that day. Dutch State Secretary of Kingdom Relations and Digitalisation Alexandra van Huffelen confirmed this in a letter to the Dutch First Chamber of Parliament.

--The budgets of the public entity of St. Eustatius from 2023 to 2026 are balanced and show a surplus of US \$100,000 to \$200,000, which were made possible with the structural increase of the free allowance from the Dutch government.

--The remains of nine indigenous people shipped to the Netherlands after an archaeological dig more than thirty years ago were repatriated to St. Eustatius. The bone fragments,

along with other artefacts, were unearthed during the 1984-1989 excavation at F.D. Roosevelt Airport by archaeologist Aad Versteeg as part of a research project by the Archaeological Centre of Leiden University and the Archaeological Anthropological Institute of the Netherlands Antilles. The research results were published in the 1992 publication, *The Archaeology of St. Eustatius: The Golden Rock*.

APRIL

--A major environmental project began in St. Eustatius and Saba to reduce erosion and safeguard endangered reefs around the two islands. The project, funded by some 722,000 euros from the European Union, will include the reforestation of areas stripped bare of vegetation. The undertaking falls directly under Resilience, Sustainable Energy and Marine Biodiversity Programme RESEMBID. St. Eustatius National Parks Foundation STENAPA will execute the project as part of a memorandum of understanding signed with the St. Eustatius government. Other partners are the Saba Conservation Foundation (SCF) and the public entity of Saba.

--A farewell party was held for departing Deputy Government Commissioner Claudia Toet. It was attended by many people from different walks of life, from government officials to private individuals.

--Catharine Elzevar Bennett-Francis was the lone recipient of a royal decoration, not only on St. Eustatius, but on all three Windward Islands this year.

--Police and firefighters conducted a rescue operation for a female hiker who was swept into the water at Gilboa Bay. Due to the rocky coast, the woman swam for over two hours to safely reach Zeelandia beach, as she could not swim to shore directly.

--A young man was injured in a stabbing at Golden Rock mini market. Later, a man D.C.J.A. (24) was arrested for attempted murder and assault with a weapon.

MAY

--The Dutch government announced funding of a maximum of 19 million euros to the public entity of St. Eustatius to stabilise the cliff on the harbour side of the island. This was stated in the Spring Memorandum, which was presented to the Dutch Parliament's Second



Telecommunications company EUTEL appointed a new supervisory board in January. From left: Ernest Sams, Catherine Cagan-Brown (secretary), Sherman Gibbs-Pompier (chairperson), Cecil Sterrod (vice-chairperson) and Edsel Hooker.



The Roman Catholic Church held a Thanksgiving Mass and rededication service for its renovated church building in December. Construction started in May 2022, which saw a few issues that resulted in the delayed completion of the project.

Chamber for discussion and approval.

--A security guard was robbed of a supermarket's daily proceeds at Maduro and Curiel's Bank (MCB) night deposit on Fort Oranjestraat. The victim was surprised by two masked men who were armed with firearms.

--The Dutch government agreed to appoint Nicoline van der Linden-Geertsema as new Deputy Government Commissioner.

--The five members of Electoral College cast their votes for the First Chamber of the Dutch Parliament in a secret ballot. The Electoral College cast four votes for D66 and one vote for Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA).

JUNE

--The public entity of St. Eustatius signed a contract with Acrobat X BV to start work to stabilise the cliff behind Eco Statia and the facilities of utilities company

STUCO. The project was slated for completion in 20 months.

--Two men were robbed at gunpoint while sitting in front of a barbershop on Heyligersweg. Police arrested a male suspect R.S. (26) two days later, and a second male suspect L.A.L. (26) voluntarily turned himself in at the police station in Oranjestad that same day.

--The St. Eustatius government hosted a brief ceremony on June 12, in remembrance of the slave revolt that occurred on that date 175 years ago. The ceremony took place at Green and White Cove on Fort Oranjestraat, where the revolt took place.

JULY

--St. Eustatius marked Emancipation Day with an ecumenical service at the Seventh-Day Adventist church in Newton Pasture. During the service, which

continued on page 21



Dutch public broadcaster NOS filmed a three-part documentary series on the history of slavery in the Dutch Caribbean. One of the episodes focused on the Windward Islands, and especially on the important role of St. Eustatius. To film the documentary, the team of director Arjan Nieuwenhuizen and presenter Kizzy Getrouw, whose mother is from St. Eustatius, stayed on the island for four days. They filmed historical sites and conducted several in-depth interviews.



The groundbreaking for the reconstruction of Oranjobaaiweg took place in May. The US \$5.5-million project, which is financed by the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, includes the repaving of 1.05 kilometre of road and beautification of the area.

ST. EUSTATIUS...continued from page 20

featured special renditions, hymns and performances, Government Commissioner Alida Francis acknowledged the apologies offered by King Willem-Alexander for the role the Netherlands played in slavery and the slave trade. The apology was met with mixed feelings by some local commentators.

--The fish stock in St. Eustatius waters is in good shape, with the lobster, reef fish and conch populations all in a healthy state. This is what researchers from Wageningen Marine Research told St. Eustatius fishermen in a meeting.

--During Statia Carnival 2023, Roselie Patrick was crowned Miss St. Eustatius, while Nayema Schmidt won Little Miss Statia and Shomica Griffith won Miss Mature.

AUGUST

--Dozens of St. Eustatius students departed the island to continue their education. Among them were D'shandre Turner, Emilio

Spanner and Mershel Herman, all of whom will be playing collegiate sports in the United States.

--Bethel Methodist School opened the 2023-2024 school year with a record number of 129 pupils, including seven in the early education group.

SEPTEMBER

--The Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) Primary School was one of ten schools, and the only one in the Dutch Caribbean, to win the second-ever Jantje Beton prize. The prize is worth 5,000 euros and is earmarked for the selected schools to give their playgrounds a much-needed facelift.

--An infant girl was found dead at a daycare centre in the Lynch area. Following the results of an autopsy, legal authorities ruled that no crime had been committed in baby's sudden and tragic death.

--St. Eustatius' oldest living resident Sophia "Miss

Mary" Busby celebrated her 104th birthday.

OCTOBER

--Persons in the Princess area of St. Eustatius heard sirens during the passing of Tropical Storm Philippe, only to learn later that a teenage boy had been injured by a nearby lightning strike.

--A major operation was undertaken to rescue a fifty-year-old hiker who had fallen deep on the inner side of The Quill's crater. The hiker was successfully rescued, despite participants being attacked by bees.

--With the unpredictability of Hurricane Tammy's track, businesses, schools and the St. Eustatius government, as well as the island's harbour and F.D. Roosevelt Airport, closed their doors in preparation for the storm. No major incidents were reported.

NOVEMBER

--The St. Eustatius government launched its new har-



Dutch State Secretary of Kingdom Relations and Digitalisation Alexandra van Huffelen (front, left) and Government Commissioner Alida Francis (front, right) being saluted by Dutch military personnel on Statia Day.



Buzzy Bees Daycare Center recognised two of its teachers, Loraine Timber-Godet and Paulette Demming, for their forty years of service in the early childhood education sector.



Statia Carnival 2023 was celebrated in July.



The housing stock for people who need social support increased by five with the completion of the second phase of the Felicia Viola van Zanten assisted living complex in September.

bour patrol boat.

--A large crowd descended on historical Fort Oranje on November 16, to witness the opening ceremony of the 247th anniversary of Statia Day. A fireworks dis-

play at Fort Oranje to mark the end of Statia Day resulted in a fire that burned part of the safety mesh on the cliff overlooking Gallows Bay. There were no reports of injuries.

--The Joint Court of Justice officially opened its fifth courthouse on November 17, this one in St. Eustatius. The first court case in the new building was heard that morning.

--A total of 339 of the island's 1,915 eligible voters cast a ballot in the Dutch parliamentary election, with half going to D66. Exactly 150 votes went to Dutch State Secretary of Kingdom Relations and Digitalisation Alexandra van Huffelen, who was the number 73 candidate on D66's slate. The second biggest list was pro-farmers party BBB, garnering 77 votes. All but one of these went to St. Eustatius-born candidate Walter Hellebrand, who had been endorsed by Island Council Member Clyde van Putten.

DECEMBER

--Jurgen Timothy Leon (JTL) Autism Foundation hosted a celebratory dinner for the six young men who participated in the Kingdom Special Olympics Games in Bonaire in November.

--An outbreak of dengue fever was declared, as the island had 64 registered cases. Six persons were hospitalised at Queen Beatrix Medical Center.

--With government officials and invited guests in attendance, a ceremony marked the official opening of Phase One of Theodore A.M. Pandt Road. The works to upgrade this section of road took almost a year to complete.

--The Netherlands returned the remains of three indigenous inhabitants of St. Eustatius that archaeologists found more than 30 years ago. The remains – an adult male, a female and her unborn child – are believed to be about 1,000 years old.

ANGUILLA YEAR IN REVIEW

JANUARY

-- Blue Week was launched. UK officials visited Anguilla to determine actions needed in fisheries, tourism, farming, health and governance of Anguillian waters.

-- The new Law Year for the countries of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court was opened. A service was held at St Mary's Pro Cathedral, and lawyers marched to the Atlin Harigan building where Chief Justice Janice Pereira addressed the lawyers in the region.

-- A State-of-the-Art Ferry Terminal at Blowing Point was opened. It was designed by Raoul Vanterpool and built by Leroy Gumbs of Leeward Construction. It is described as enabling an efficient, safe, secure and enjoyable travel experience. Funding was from the UK Anguilla Programme, post Hurricane Irma fund.

FEBRUARY

-- Lord Goldsmith, UK Minister for the Overseas Territories and Paul Candlar, Director of the Overseas Territories visited Anguilla to launch the Blue Belt Programme. It is the UK's Ocean Conservation Programme initiative for coastal management,

biodiversity loss and plastic pollution.

-- ANGLEC (Anguilla Electricity Company) announced that it had acquired three electric vehicles. CEO Sutcliffe Hodge said it is the start of transitioning to cleaner energy.

--The entire island lost communication with the outside world for two days due to a mega yacht in Crocus Bay cutting the main fibre optic cable. Divers and technicians from St Maarten were in Anguilla re-connecting the cable.

--Groundbreaking took place for the Vivien Vanterpool Primary School that was destroyed in Hurricane Irma. A new classroom block and IT laboratory were constructed adjacent to the Island Harbour bay.

MARCH

--There was a fatal boat accident when a Calypso tourist boat got into difficulties in rough seas. Two persons died, one tourist and one crew member, and the other four people on the boat were taken to the Princess Alexandra Hospital, but later released.

--An Aquaponics system was launched at the Agricultural Department. It is aimed at reducing food imports and helping food security.

--The Duke of Edinburgh golf tournament was held at the Aurora International Golf Club with 38 players participating. The two winners went to the UK for the finals.

--An MRI machine, donated by Richard Schulze, owner of Aurora Resort and Golf Club, was launched. It is housed in a container with office facilities included.

APRIL

--The government dismissed the board of ANGLEC and installed a new board. This means that the ANGLEC plans for three phased renewable energy will not take place as government wants a Power Purchase Agreement instead and the new board will facilitate that.

--The government launched a Senior Shield programme for persons 70 years and over. It provides free health care at all government health facilities. It also includes free medication.

--A new Police Commissioner arrived in Anguilla, Robert Clark, who has operational and communication based experience.

MAY

--On May 7, the Royal Anguilla Police Force reported a fatal shooting of a 35 year old man in Long Path.

--Governor Dileeni and Premier Ellis Lorenzo Webster went to London to attend the Coronation of King Charles III. They attended a reception at Buckingham Palace and shook hands with the king.

--An altercation took place at Tasty's Restaurant, that became top news for many months. Minister for Sustainability, Innovation and the Environment Quincia Gumbs Marie reportedly was in a quarrel and threatened a man with death, and attacked him with a chair, causing injury to one of his fingers. The video of the incident went viral but neither the governor or premier took action against the minister causing much criticism throughout the island.

--The Anguilla Day Parade was held at the Ronald Webster Park with the theme, "Forging towards a common destiny: Anguilla proud and strong."

JUNE

--Governor Dileeni left Anguilla to take up the post of governor in the Turks and Caicos islands. The Director of the Overseas Territories



New Ferry Terminal



Anguilla Day Parade

in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Paul Candlar arrived in Anguilla to be the Acting Governor until the new governor arrives on September 9.

--Zharnel Hughes, Anguilla's top athlete who runs for Britain, broke the British men's 100m record with a 9.83sec run. The record had not been broken for 30 years since it was established by Linford Christie.

--Premier Ellis Lorenzo Webster attended several meetings regionally including the ministerial meeting on Non-Communicable Diseases and Mental Health in Bridgetown, Barbados; a meeting of the OECS Authority which was in St Kitts and Nevis; and the 53rd Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Caribbean Development Bank in St Lucia.

--Chief Fire Officer, Shondell Hodge attended the World Maritime Congress in Rotterdam. Joint exercises are planned with St

Maarten and the British Virgin Islands.

JULY

--A new Dialysis Unit opened. The US\$1.5 million state-of-the-art facility was funded by the UK and provides 8 dialysis machines in a comfortable 4,000 square foot space which is well suited to accommodate Anguilla's needs.

--Anguilla was second in Travel and Leisure World's Best Awards in the UK and provides 8 dialysis machines in a comfortable 4,000 square foot space which is well suited to accommodate Anguilla's needs.

--The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States Environment Ministers met in Anguilla. The agenda included ocean governance, climate resilience, data management and sustainable financing.

AUGUST

--Carnival festivities went smoothly until the end of the Parade of Troupes when

there was a fatal shooting incident. The shooting happened as the Parade of Troupes was coming to an end and troupes were heading to the Landsome Bowl for a final evening of music and dancing.

--De Wizard, an A Class boat, won the Champion of Champions race and was declared the Boat of the Year.

--The fibre optic cable that was cut in Crocus Bay in February was repaired.

--Adisa Jameel Jordan, a 29 year old maintenance worker and a national of Trinidad and Tobago, was charged with the offences of murder, attempted murder, possession of a firearm, possession of ammunition, unlawful discharge of a firearm and possession of a firearm with intent to endanger life.

--Keithroy Morson, singing as The Voice, captured the crown in the Leeward Islands Calypso Competi-

continued on page 23



Coronation visit to London by Premier and Governor.



New Commissioner of Police, Robert Clark.

ANGUILLA...continued from page 22

tion. He was representing Montserrat but he has won previous competitions singing as De Bear for Antigua and Barbuda. Eight countries took part including Antigua, Montserrat, Anguilla, St Thomas, St Kitts, St Croix and Nevis.

SEPTEMBER

--Governor Julia Crouch was sworn in as Anguilla's governor. In her first address to the nation she said, "I pledge to be your champion, to ensure Anguilla's voice is heard and understood, especially in the UK. To that end I plan to travel around the territory and get to meet as many of you as I can."

--National Youth Week was held with the theme "Securing Our Future: Co-Creating a Financially Resilient Anguilla." At the 16th National Youth and Development Conference the main focus was on finance.

--Premier Ellis Lorenzo Webster presented the Medium Term Economic and Fiscal plan. It was decided to remove the Property Tax next year and to remove the Goods and Services Tax from insurance, medicine and medical sup-

plies.

OCTOBER

--Renderings of the proposed new airport terminal were presented to the public. It is estimated that construction will commence in January 2024.

--The nation was shocked with the fatal shooting of a 14 year old school boy at the Ronald Webster Park during lunch hour. Another student was shot and injured in the incident. Security at the school and on the school buses was heightened.

--Zharnel Hughes returned to Anguilla for a short holiday and was met at the airport by government officials, family and friends who were all celebrating his recent successes.

--Hurricane Tammy passed with no effects but the severe storm the following day caused a lightning strike on one of ANGLEC's generators. This cut electricity to the entire island and some residents were without power for five days.

--Fork Farms Hydroponic Flex Farms Systems was launched. The system uses 80% less water than regular methods and produces good

amounts of vegetables and herbs.

NOVEMBER

--Parliament re-opened with an address from Premier Ellis Lorenzo Webster outlining the government's plans for the upcoming year and listing the legislation that they hope to accomplish.

--Kyle Hodge, island-wide elected member of the House of Assembly, announced that he was joining the Anguilla United Front (AUF). He was formerly a minister with the Anguilla Progressive Movement (APM) but resigned in June this year as he disagreed with the Goods and Services Tax being implemented. The AUF now has five elected members and the APM has six.

--Premier Ellis Lorenzo Webster, Minister of Infrastructure and Tourism Haydn Hughes, Permanent Secretary Kathleen Rogers and Public Relations Officer, Ivan Connor were in London for the Joint Minis-

terial Council of the Overseas Territories. The 2023 JMC meeting focused on re-framing the relationship between the OTs and the UK as well as the development of a new UK strategy for its engagement with the Overseas Territories.

--Three detectives from the UK arrived in Anguilla to lend their support and expertise to the Royal Anguilla Police Force (RAPF). They are designated to assist in crucial aspects of law enforcement including combating organised and serious crime activities and addressing alleged corruption within the police ranks.

--Anguilla's first National Green Space was opened in The Valley – it is a large area of trees, shrubs, a duck pond, and tables and benches for people to relax. It is described as a place of peace where people can go to relax, exercise, play with their children, eat lunch and socialise.

DECEMBER

--Doctors and laboratory



Zharnel Hughes breaks record.

technicians from Anguilla and across the Overseas Territories met in Anguilla for a three day workshop to discuss the threat posed by anti-microbial resistance. They shared expertise and discussed ways of combating drug resistant bacteria.

--A delegation from Anguilla attended the prestigious International Luxury Travel Market (ITLM) in Cannes, France. The event gave unparalleled opportunities for travel specialists to connect with the world's top brands and destinations.

--The groundbreaking took place for Anguilla's first

Marina – Altamer Harbour Yacht Club and Luxury Resort. It is an ambitious project with several partners. Plans are for a 118-berth marina to accommodate yachts of up to 250 feet in size, a 62-room 5-star hotel, and 58 branded residences. Phase 1 is the marina that is estimated to be completed by the end of 2025.

--Premier Ellis Lorenzo Webster gave a positive budget address with plans for each department of government including more funds for police officers and CCTV around the island. No new taxes were announced.



New Governor



Launch of Anguilla's first Marina.



"De Wizard" is Boat of the Year.



Renderings of new Airport Terminal.

2023: Year overshadowed by brutal war in Middle East



Feb: Turkey earthquake



Jun: Titan sub disaster



Jul: Barbenheimer frenzy



Jul: Screen actors' strike



Apr: Starship test



May: King crowned



Jun: Smog from wildfires



Sep: Libya catastrophe



Oct: Israel-Hamas war



Jun: Ukraine dam destroyed



Sep: Iconic tree felled



Oct: Israeli hostages

JAN 8 Supporters of former president **Jair Bolsonaro** invade Brazil's National Congress in an effort to oust President **Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva**

16 Italy's most-wanted Mafia boss is arrested in Sicily after 30 years on the run



4 **Donald Trump** becomes the first former U.S. president to face a criminal trial, pleading not guilty to the first of a growing list of charges



JUL 6 Earth experiences its hottest day to date, with an average temperature of 17.23°C (63°F)

14 Movie actors join a strike by screenwriters in the industry's biggest shutdown in 60 years

24 Two starkly contrasting films, **Barbie** and **Oppenheimer**, are released simultaneously, sparking the cultural phenomenon dubbed **Barbenheimer**

26 Niger's presidential guard stages a coup d'état, detaining President **Mohamed Bazoum**

AUG 7 Canada's worst ever wildfire season leads to the loss of around four percent of the country's entire forest area

8 Wildfires in Hawaii kill more than 110 people and destroy the historic town of Lahaina



23 India's **Chandrayaan-3** becomes the first spacecraft to land near the moon's south pole

30 President **All Bongo** of Gabon is ousted in a military coup, ending his family's 55 years in power

SEP 7 **Storm Daniel** unleashes four days of cataclysmic rain in central Greece

8 A severe earthquake in Morocco kills almost 3,000 people and destroys historic landmarks in and around Marrakesh

10 Storm Daniel hits Libya, causing two dams to collapse and leaving at least 4,000 people dead in the coastal city of Derna

12 North Korean leader **Kim Jong Un** travels to eastern Russia for a summit with President Putin

18 Canada expels a top Indian diplomat, sparking a major diplomatic row

19 Azerbaijan recaptures the breakaway republic of Nagorno-Karabakh in a lightning offensive that empties the region of its ethnic Armenian population

24 NASA's **OSIRIS-REx** mission successfully returns samples of the asteroid Benu to Earth



28 Vandals cut down a landmark sycamore tree on Hadrian's Wall in northern England

OCT 3 **Kevin McCarthy** becomes the first Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives to be ousted from office

7 Two earthquakes claim more than 2,000 lives in Herat, in western Afghanistan

7 Israel declares a state of war after Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups launch multiple attacks from the Gaza Strip that kill at least 1,200 Israelis and seize more than 240 hostages

14 In a referendum, Australian voters reject altering the Constitution to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament

NOV 13 Gaza's largest hospital, Al-Shifa, runs out of fuel. Some 600 patients, staff and 1,500 people taking shelter from Israeli air strikes are trapped inside

19 Far-right libertarian outsider **Javier Milei** (below left) is elected president of Argentina, vowing "drastic" changes in government



22 Far-right leader **Geert Wilders** (right) wins a dramatic election victory in the Netherlands to send shockwaves through the EU

24 A temporary ceasefire between Israel and Hamas sees a number of Israeli and other hostages freed in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, and vital humanitarian aid allowed into Gaza

28 All 41 construction workers trapped in a tunnel in northern India after a landslide are rescued after 17 days underground

DEC 3 Venezuelans approve a referendum to claim sovereignty over an oil-rich region of neighbouring Guyana



6 **Taylor Swift's** Eras tour becomes the first to gross \$1 billion. In the same week she is named Time's person of the year

13 The first ever UN climate deal calling for a global transition away from fossil fuels is adopted at **COP28** in Dubai

6 An earthquake in Turkey and Syria kills over 51,000 people and leaves two million homeless in the deadliest natural disaster in Turkey's modern history

MAR 13 **Cyclone Freddy** batters southern Africa for a second time in its five-week duration. It claims over 1,400 lives in Malawi and Mozambique

21 Chinese president **Xi Jinping** makes a state visit to Russia in a show of support for President **Vladimir Putin**

APR 4 Finland becomes the 31st member of NATO, doubling the length of the security alliance's borders with Russia

7 Millions of people in the eastern U.S. and central Canada are warned to limit time outdoors due to smoke and bad air quality from wildfires in Ontario and Quebec

18 The catastrophic implosion of the **Titan** submersible on a dive to view the wreck of the **Titanic** kills all five people on board



24 **Yevgeny Prigozhin's** Wagner Group mutinies against Moscow, but the revolt is called off within hours. Prigozhin dies in a plane crash two months later

AI defined 2023. Bullets and ballots will shape 2024

LONDON--How to sum up the most important news of the year past? The obvious answer in 2023 is to use Artificial Intelligence. In that spirit, Reuters asked OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Bard – two of the most popular generative AI tools – to do the job for them.

Their responses show AI's power, but also the ways it still falls short, in this case both in terms of Reuters editorial standards and when compared to human editors.

ChatGPT told Reuters that "As an AI, I don't have real-time access to current events or the internet to know the specific events of 2023" before offering the news agency "a hypothetical scenario based on current trends and topics."

Its rosy scenario included the global community agreeing "to a radical and comprehensive set of measures to reduce carbon emissions significantly by 2030," scientists successfully wrapping up final phase clinical trials of an unnamed cancer vaccine, and the United

Nations brokering a deal to end decades of geopolitical tensions in an unspecified region of the world.

If only.

Bard was more helpful and accurate, offering Reuters a summary of news from the Russia-Ukraine war (though it was slightly unclear on what year the war started), what happened to the global economy, and details of tech developments, including AI and gene editing. It missed the war between Hamas and Israel.

But even if AI cannot yet match a journalist, the technology's emergence in 2023 promised (or threatened, depending on your viewpoint) a profound shift in the way humans operate, and boosted the stock prices of companies that embraced that promise. In 2024, expect more progress and more news on regulators scrambling to keep up.

Next year will also be defined by bullets and ballots.

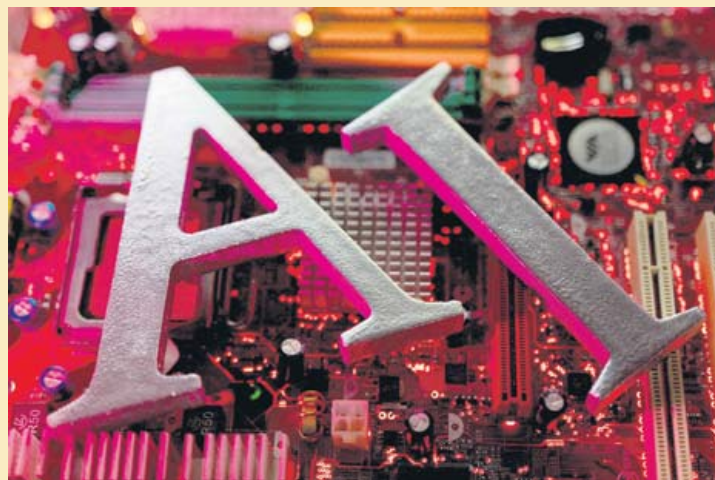
In October, Hamas militants attacked Israel, killing around 1,200 civilians and taking about 240 more captive. The brutal surprise attack – the single most deadly day in Israel's history – triggered a massive retal-

iatory operation. Israel has pounded Hamas and other militant groups in Gaza for weeks, ordered the movement of more than a million people within the tiny enclave, and killed, according to the Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry, more than 14,000 Palestinians, including 5,000 children.

A days-long pause in late November to allow Hamas to return some Israeli hostages and Israel to return some Palestinian prisoners to Gaza, ended and the fighting looks likely to drag into 2024.

The conflict in Ukraine also shows no sign of slowing. Russian and Ukrainian forces continue to fight in Ukraine's east and the south, but momentum on both sides has ground to a near halt. The key to any change in the stalemate lies as much in Washington and Brussels – and the West's appetite for continued help for Ukraine – as it does in Moscow and Kyiv.

This was also the year China's economic struggles worsened, even as Beijing and Washington attempted to mend relations between their two countries. In 2024, those efforts, and even the



AI (Artificial Intelligence) letters are placed on computer motherboard in this illustration taken, June 23, 2023.

likelihood of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, will pivot on what happens in the U.S. presidential elections. A second term for Donald Trump would throw everything up in the air again – including the future of U.S. democracy.

The U.S. election will be the single, most defining political event next year, both at home and abroad. But other major stories will emerge from voting booths

around the globe.

More than 900 million eligible voters in India will determine the political fate of Prime Minister Narendra Modi next spring. Mexico may cast aside a tradition of machismo and elect Mexico City mayor Claudia Sheinbaum as its first female President. And a less competitive race is taking shape in Russia, where Vladimir Putin is seeking another six-year term in office, putting

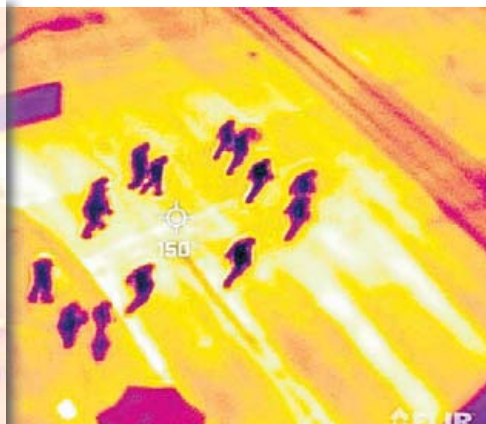
him in the realm of Joseph Stalin's lengthy reign over the country.

Like many newsrooms, Reuters is experimenting with how AI can help package, produce and deliver journalism. But that journalism will continue to come from reporters on the ground around the world, covering the news that matters without fear or favour.



A man carries a wounded Palestinian girl at the site of Israeli strikes on a house, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, October 11, 2023.

Local residents cross the street to attend a baseball game during a 27 days long heat wave with temperatures over 110 degrees Fahrenheit (43 degrees Celsius), in downtown in Phoenix, Arizona, U.S., July 26, 2023. On July 26 at 12:24, a Flir One ProThermal camera registered a surface temperature of 150 degrees Fahrenheit (65 degrees Celsius), with an air temperature of 92 degrees Fahrenheit (33 degrees Celsius) according to the National Weather Service. Photographing weather is a very challenging assignment, not just for physical reasons, but also because it can be very difficult to illustrate something like heat, which in itself is invisible," photographer Carlos Barria said.



A Sudanese family who fled the conflict in Murnei in Sudan's Darfur region, sit beside their belongings while waiting to be registered by UNHCR upon crossing the border between Sudan and Chad in Adre, Chad, July 26, 2023.

A Ukrainian serviceman of the 57th Kost Hordlienko Separate Motorised Infantry Brigade fires a 2S22 Bohdana self-propelled howitzer towards Russian troops, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, at a position near the city of Bakhmut in Donetsk region, Ukraine, July 5, 2023.



2023: The year in science



MISSION TO JUPITER'S OCEAN WORLDS

APRIL: ESA's Jupiter Icy Moons Explorer, *Juice*, blasts off to make detailed observations of the giant gas planet and its three large ocean-bearing moons – *Europa*, *Ganymede* and *Callisto* – with a suite

of remote sensing instruments. The mission will characterise these moons as planetary objects and possible habitats for life. *Juice* will arrive at Jupiter in 2031

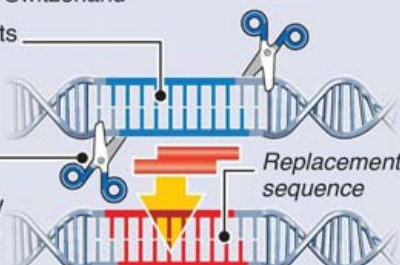
CRISPR GENE-EDITING MARVEL

NOVEMBER: In a world first, the UK medicines regulator approves a therapy that uses **CRISPR–Cas9** gene-editing as a treatment for sickle-cell disease.

CASGEVY (*exagamglogene autotemcel*) is a first-of-its-kind treatment made by Vertex Pharmaceuticals and CRISPR Therapeutics in Zug, Switzerland

CRISPR–Cas9: Edits faulty gene in stem cells isolated from bone marrow

Genetic scissors: Replace DNA of cells so that the body produces functioning haemoglobin



*Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats

AI TEXT-TO-IMAGE TECHNOLOGY

APRIL: Artificial intelligence software can generate artwork in seconds using just a few text prompts.

AI image generators use images, patterns and captions found on the internet to help learn how to use a text prompt to create visuals

Copyright: Artists and photographers claim AI uses their work without consent

AI-generated image (left) and original image by animal photographer Tim Flach

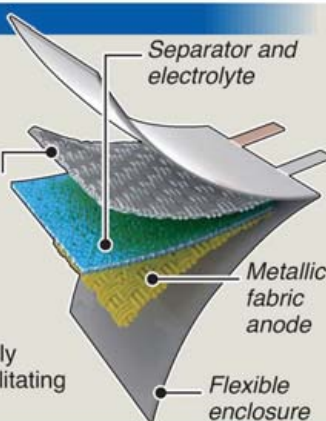


FLEXIBLE BATTERIES

JUNE: A new generation of flexible batteries may allow the seamless integration of technology into clothes.

Metallic fabric cathode

The ability to be bent, twisted and stretched makes them ideal for wearable medical devices and biomedical sensors. Health-related applications could transmit data wirelessly to healthcare providers, facilitating remote patient monitoring



SCIENTISTS GET SERIOUS ABOUT UFOS

OCTOBER: The Pentagon reports 274 **Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena (UAP)** sightings from Aug 2022 to Apr 2023.

Harvard's **Galileo Project** collects high-quality data on UAPs, capturing continuous video of the sky in infrared, optical, and radio bands.

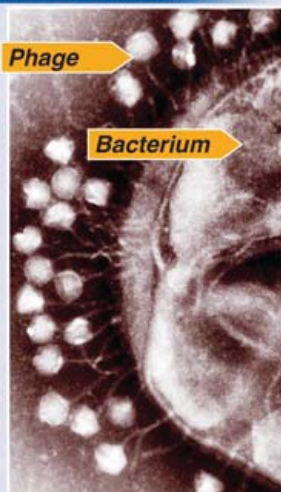


NASA has created a UAP study team and **Enigma Labs** has developed a smartphone app offering a repository of 270,000 UAP sightings over the past century

PHAGES-BASED BIOCONTROL OF BACTERIA

JUNE: The number of microbes living on and within the human body can exceed the number of human cells. Advances allow engineering of **phages** to benefit human well-being and augment agricultural productivity.

Upon infection, a phage deploys a syringe-like device to inject its DNA into the bacterium. Bioengineered phages can change a host bacterium's functions, causing it to produce a therapeutic molecule or to become sensitive to a certain drug



FUSION – ENERGY OF THE FUTURE

JULY: Scientists at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California generate a burst of energy by bombarding a pellet of hydrogen with 192 lasers, reproducing for a brief moment the process of fusion that powers our Sun.

The experiment generated 3.88 megajoules (MJ) of energy after the lasers delivered 2.05MJ to the target – 89% more energy came out of the target than went into it



Where is democracy headed in 2024? Trump may have the final word

LONDON--Russia's Vladimir Putin looks set to remain in power until at least 2030; India's Narendra Modi seems certain to extend his rule to 2029; and Donald Trump could return to the White House despite charges of subverting U.S. democracy.

For those who worry that authoritarian rulers are firmly in the ascendant over more liberal democrats, there is likely to be much to fret about in 2024. In all, the governance of more than a quarter of the world's population will be at stake in elections next year, including Taiwan next month,

Russia in March, India by May and the United States in November.

Britain is also likely to elect a new parliament by the end of 2024, though that vote could slip into January 2025. But no contest could have a bigger impact on the debate over the future of democracy than the U.S. presidential election.

Why It Matters

Trump, who never conceded defeat in the 2020 U.S. election and falsely claimed the vote was rigged, has vowed retribution on opponents if returned to power, including the Department of Justice, the federal bu-

reaucracy and President Joe Biden.

That has fanned fears that political hostilities in the United States could turn white hot and cause civil unrest. Trump has a slight lead in opinion polls even as he defends multiple criminal charges against him.

Taiwan holds presidential and parliamentary elections on Jan. 13, and the outcome could shape how Chinese President Xi Jinping pursues his goal of taking control of what Beijing considers "sacred" Chinese territory.

China detests the front-running presidential candidate, the Democratic Progressive Party's Lai Ching-te, believing him to be a separatist. U.S. military officers have said Xi has ordered the Chinese military to be prepared to invade Taiwan by 2027.



Supporters of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) carry a hoarding of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Minister of Home Affairs Amit Shah for celebrations after winning three out of four states in key regional polls outside the party headquarters in Ahmedabad, India, December 3, 2023.



Lai Ching-te, Taiwan's vice president and the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) presidential candidate gestures during an election campaign event in Kaohsiung, Taiwan December 22, 2023.



A person holds a placard with the mugshot of Republican presidential candidate and former U.S. President Donald Trump, on the day of Trump's rally in Durham, New Hampshire, U.S., December 16, 2023.



Russian President Vladimir Putin works in his office in Moscow, Russia December 27, 2023.

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In Russia, Putin's re-election as president seems assured after years of cracking down on political opposition. That means Russia's war on Ukraine also looks set to continue, testing the patience of Kyiv's main ally, the United States. Trump has been critical of the high level of U.S. military support for Ukraine.

In India, Modi, another self-styled strongman, is sailing towards re-election as prime minister, having nurtured an uncompromising leadership style that plays well to many voters and foreign investors but riles human rights groups.

If Modi's Hindu nationalist party wins, the economy rather than rights is expected

to remain his main focus.

What It Means

In the debate over whether liberal democracy is losing to authoritarianism and autocracy, Africa also has a voice.

Coups in Niger and Gabon this year have extended the retreat of democracy in West and Central Africa, where there have been eight coups since 2020. But further south, a big and lively political contest is in prospect for 2024.

After three decades of government marred by graft and economic decline, South Africa's African National Congress risks losing its parliamentary majority for the first time since Nelson Mandela led it to power in 1994 at the end of apartheid.

If so, the ANC may need a coalition partner to stay in power -- likely either

the Democratic Alliance, popular with white voters, or the Economic Freedom Fighters, a Marxist party favoured by poor black voters. Either way, South African democracy will have turned a corner. The election is due sometime between May and August.

Overall, will democracy take a backward step in 2024?

U.S.-based pro-democracy lobby Freedom House, which uses political rights and civil liberties as a measure of democracy, says it has been in decline for 17 years. But in its latest report card, it suggested democracy was making a comeback.

Thirty-four nations made improvements in 2022 and the tally of countries with declines, at 35, was the smallest recorded since the negative pattern began, it said in the report in March.

After landmark World Cup, more sponsors keen on women's sport in 2024

NEW YORK—A gender-equal Olympic Games next year will coincide with increasing sponsorship opportunities for female athletes, experts say, after the Women's World Cup soccer tournament underscored the growing popularity of women's sport in 2023.

Organisers say Paris 2024 will be the first Games to feature an even number of male and female athletes, a landmark that has been a long time coming after years of work by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to create equal medal opportunities.

Regarding sponsorship, men's sport is still king. A Sports Innovation Lab survey this year that included more than 25 Fortune 500 brands found only about 9% of respondents' sports media and sponsorship dollars were

spent on women's sport.

However, 83% of respondents from that survey said they planned to increase their investment in 2024. "We heard from a lot of those that they were setting their sights on the Olympics and on doing more with female athletes," said Sports Innovation Lab CMO Gina Waldhorn. "Brands are really celebrating all of the milestones in women's sports each year. I think we'll also see them celebrate this as another one of those critical milestones."

The 2023 Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand could foreshadow women's sport becoming even more appealing to sponsors in 2024, as tense pre-tournament TV negotiations gave way to record-breaking viewership across the globe.

Conrad Wiacek, head of sport analysis at research firm GlobalData, said that soccer had played a large

role historically in developing the profile of female athletes.

"There is an opportunity there (for brands) to forge a relationship with female audiences directly through partnerships in women's sport (be that) individual athletes or teams," said Wiacek. "And cynically, those opportunities at the moment are more cost effective than certain men's sports and male athletes."

Replica Jerseys

The popularity of the Women's World Cup this year prompted a quick response from brands such as Adidas and Nike, whose jerseys were worn by Spain and England respectively in the final.

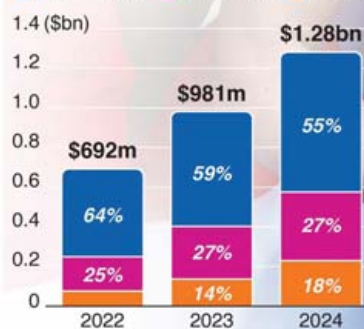
A widespread outcry from fans after the tournament prompted Nike to release a replica England goalkeeper's jersey, having initially not stocked one for Golden Glove winner Mary Earps.

Women's sports revenue to top \$1bn

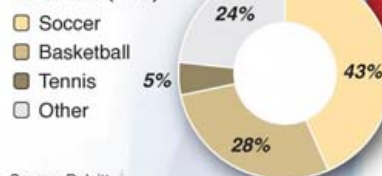
Elite women's sports are predicted to generate global revenues above \$1bn for the first time in 2024, after a year of sustained growth including the FIFA Women's World Cup

WOMEN'S ELITE SPORT REVENUE

Commercial Broadcast Matchday



PREDICTED REVENUE BY SPORT (2024)



Source: Deloitte

Picture: Getty Images *Including sponsorships, partnerships and merchandising © GRAPHIC NEWS



Spain's Salma Paralluelo scores their first goal against Sweden in the semifinal of the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia and New Zealand at Eden Park, Auckland, New Zealand August 15, 2023.



Indian wrestlers Vinesh Phogat, Bajrang Punia, and Sakshi Malik address a news conference as they take part in a sit-in protest demanding arrest of Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief, who they accuse of sexually harassing female players, in New Delhi, India, April 24, 2023.



Serbia's Olga Danilovic sustains an injury to her ankle during her third round match against Tunisia's Ons Jabeur at the French Open at Roland Garros in Paris, France, June 3, 2023. "I joined the crowd in gasping as she dropped her tennis racket, her legs buckled, and she collapsed onto the clay, winning in pain," said photographer Clodagh Kilcoyne. A physiotherapist bandaged up her ankle and she returned to the game, but Jabeur had the momentum and went on to win the match.



United States perform during the Teams Acrobatic Routine in Artistic Swimming during the Pan-Am Games in Santiago, Chile November 3, 2023.

"There's a true benefit to doing business with women athletes," said Thayer Lavielle, executive vice president at The Collective, sports and entertainment agency Wasserman's women's division. "How that's translating into 2024 I think is a little bit still too early to tell because we're not seeing those campaigns roll out. But (there are) certainly positive signs."

Visa, one of the longest-standing Olympic sponsors, announced in November the highest percentage of women athletes in their "Team Visa" programme for 2024. Valarie Allman, an Asics athlete and Olympic champion in women's discus, told Reuters that finding "authentic matches" with brands makes a world of difference for her peers.

"It takes that sense of being vulnerable to show who you are, to show what you value, to let you be yourself, kind of put your heart on your sleeve," she said. "And that ends up being kind of that magnet to companies that will show interest and provide opportunities."

Sport continues to be a catalyst for protest despite misgivings

LONDON--*Sport and politics would ideally never mix but as the world becomes increasingly divided on societal issues, sporting platforms have turned into lightning rods for social activism. Be it athletes or spectators, disobedience or disruption has been the order of the day as they attempt to transcend the boundaries of the arena and convey their views to millions of people worldwide.*

When Colin Kaepernick took a knee during the U.S. national anthem at NFL games to protest against racial injustice in 2016, little did he know the butterfly effect his deed would have as it sparked debates and

polarised a country.

But his gesture has since been embraced by top leagues around the world, none more so than England's Premier League -- European soccer's most lucrative and popular competition. A spillover from the Black Lives Matter movement that began over three years ago, the league's players continue to fight discrimination by taking a knee before some games this season.

"We are unified in our belief that any form of discrimination has no place within football or wider society," the 20 Premier League captains said earlier this year. "(We) are committed to using our platform to help celebrate diversity

and show our support in the fight against racism."

The continued protests are, to a large extent, to do with rampant online abuse which rears its ugly head every week, with social media platforms seemingly unable to stem the flow of unbridled rage and racial abuse that lands in players' inboxes.

Outside the arena, Olympic medal-winning wrestlers in India found out the hard way what lies in store for those who leverage their popularity to go up against a member of the ruling party after months of protests on the streets fell on deaf ears. India's top wrestlers were detained by police in May when they intensified their protest demanding the ar-



Referee Sam Allison and players take a knee before the English Premier League match between Sheffield United and Luton Town at Bramall Lane, Sheffield, Britain on December 26, 2023.



England's Ben Stokes tries to stop a just stop oil protesters during the Second Test of the Ashes between England and Australia at Lord's Cricket Ground, London, Britain June 28, 2023.



Sporting highlights of 2023

January

28-29 Aryna Sabalenka wins maiden major at Australian Open. Novak Djokovic claims record-extending 10th title

29 Denmark beat France to clinch third IHF World Men's Handball Championship

Rugby hero

Siya Kolisi holds Webb Ellis Cup

Alpine queen

Yellow jersey

Tennis icon

F1 champion

June

September

February

March

April

May

July

August

October

November

December

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3 Prolific striker Erling Haaland (right) breaks Premier League goals record with 35th goal of season for Manchester City

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31 Australia, led by Pat Cummins (right), retain Ashes after drawing five-match cricket series against England

20 Spain beat England to become first European team to win Women's World Cup since 2007

23 Jonas Vingegaard defends Tour de France crown

12 Denver win NBA Finals

12 Carlos Alcaraz wins Wimbledon in pulsating five-set final (left)

11 At Roland Garros, Djokovic secures record 23rd major. Iga Swiatek wins women's title (right)

10 Man City win first European Cup -- securing treble after Premier League and FA Cup triumphs

11 Mikaela Shiffrin becomes most successful skier in World Cup history, overthrowing overall record of Ingemar Stenmark

12 Kansas City Chiefs defeat Philadelphia Eagles in Super Bowl LVII

7 LA Lakers star LeBron James (right) becomes all-time leading scorer in NBA history

6 PGA Tour, European Tour and Saudi-funded LIV Golf agree to merge to unify fractured world of golf

9 Teenage star Coco Gauff wins first Grand Slam title at U.S. Open

24 Tigist Assefa of Ethiopia smashes women's world record by over two minutes at Berlin Marathon

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11 At Roland Garros, Djokovic

Not a great year for local Sports

The year twenty-twenty-three was not a great year for sports on the island of St. Maarten. The double effects of Hurricane Irma and the pandemic have stressed the athletes, the facilities and the teams and institutions, yet our community continues to reach for the best in themselves, against overwhelming odds.

The pitch at the Raoul Illidge Sports Complex (RISC), our national stadium, remains in such a state of disrepair that the national team had to play home soccer matches in the stadiums of Anguilla. The Melford Hazel Multi-Sports Hall in Sucker Gar-

den was closed for most of the year due to concerns regarding the safety of the athletes, young or old. Security could not be guaranteed due to hooligans in the area.

While these two facilities are closed, others had trouble also. Netball tried to start their season in January. There was a nice opening ceremony, with guest speakers, dignitaries and an audience of young players, ready to go. Then the power went out and the games had to be cancelled for the day.

For a bit of good news, a new exercise area was opened in June. The Boardwalk Sports Park is open to anyone seeking

to work out on the beach.

Let's look at some categories of sports across the year and check in with how they progressed.

College Sports

Topping the list of sports accomplishments are young local athletes, both men and women who received college scholarships to play ball. Baseball and softball led the charge towards higher education, but volleyball squeezed in an ace or two.

Island Elite Sports Foundation assisted in organizing try-outs, bringing in recruiting scouts, and helped both athletes and

continued on page 31



SXM Tri Academie athlete Gregoire Pigeon won the second edition of the ENNIA St. Maarten Marathon at the uphill finish on Fort Amsterdam completing the 42K distance in 3:14: 47 in December.



Josue Hyacinth and Brian Paulson are the top players in the St. Maarten Pool League. Paulson won the St. Maarten Pool League's fourth ranking tournament of the 2023-24 season in September.



Team St. Maarten won five gold medals, four silver and two bronze at the 2023 Global Open Kukkiwon Cup International Taekwondo Championship in North Carolina. A total of 1,684 athletes, representing 37 countries participated. St. Maarten was represented by Lee - Ann Liu, Rosalia Rique - Lee, Ramsaran Jhavid, and Natram Gunesh from the King Yen Taekwondo School.



The Melford Hazel Sports Hall has been closed due to vandalism and "hooligans" pestering athletes.



Sint Maarten Yacht Club (SMYC) celebrated the 30th anniversary of the yacht club's sailing school with the launch of its Sailability Programme boat adapted for disabled sailors.



St. Maarten's inaugural Grant Thornton Kids Race showcases future long-distance runners.

LOCAL SPORTS continued from page 30

parents find school matches. They also worked with athletes from Statia, Curaçao and Aruba, for a total of 11 athletes getting scholarships to play with college teams in 2023. There could have been 12 but one athlete chose to turn pro.

Looking forward to 2024 even more athletes are expected to receive scholarships with the sports of track and field and soccer being added to the list which looks to total 19 by the end of 2024. Island Elite reports there are five more athletes in 2024 looking for school matches. Not bad for an organisation that was just founded in July 2022.

Basketball

St. Maarten basketball athletes played sports locally and tried out for college teams. They also travelled to the Netherlands to compete on Dutch National teams.

The Performance Sports Academy (PSA) was able to negotiate the try-outs for St. Maarten athletes Malachi Martis, age 16, and Clorvens Celine, age 17. Martis is a 6'6" guard. He has the ability to create space for himself and his teammates to score while being on the floor. Martis is considered by many to be the best player on the island

under the age of 18.

Celine is a 6'4" shooting guard who has shown that he can play the game at a higher level. Celine is a two-way type of player, meaning that he prides himself on both defence and offence.

Sailing

The sailing community led the sports tourism field with the premiere sporting event, the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta. The annual event attracts sailors from around the world and has served to brand our island for both boat and beer enthusiasts.

But the Heineken Regatta is not the only sailing regatta to attract a lot of attention. The Caribbean Multihull regatta is growing. There is also La Course de L'alliance now in its 19th year.

Other wind sports are emerging into regional competitions, too. Windsurfing, paragliding and the St. Maarten Yacht Club has a great youth program that teaches wannabe sailors how to harness the wind using Optimists, Daims and even Laser sailboats.

Fishing

The St. Maarten Sport Fishing Foundation (SSFF) celebrated its 15 year anniversary, hosting sport fishing events. After being established only 7 months the Foundation hosted its first tournament in November 2008.



The Caribbean Multihull Challenge Race & Rally announced that for the 6th edition, sailors will be able to compete in Time Trials for Cruising Multihulls.



July started with the Sandbar to Buccaneer Beach Bar Run and Kayak race. A total 93 athletes, including 18 teams, participated in the first edition organised by St. Maarten Road Runners, that offered athletes the opportunity to run a 5km individually or in teams followed by a 2km paddle.



St. Maarten Bodybuilder Burnargis Browne celebrates with St. Maarten Bodybuilding & Fitness Federation President Shamire Connor after winning the Mr. Universe Pro Qualifier in Brazil.



Renowned Padel influencer Sandy Farquharson, founder of The Padel School, visited St. Maarten in August and conducted a series of clinics at SXM Padel Club in Belair.



Team St. Maarten competed in the NACAC (North American, Central American and Caribbean Athletic Association) Under 13 and Under 15 Age Group Meet held in the Dominican Republic July 15 and 16.



St. Maarten Kickboxer and MMA fighter and instructor Akeem Lewis (29) won a World Kickboxing Network (WKN) amateur Heavy weight world title. He fought and beat Enzo Audouin in June.



The Summer Sizzler swim meet was attended by swimmers from four teams: Anguilla Aquastars, Dolphin Swim Team, Super Splash Swim Team, and host Carib Swim Team in June.

LOCAL SPORTS continued from page 31

The 12th SXM Wahoo Fishing tournament placed Navigator from Saba as the 2023 champion for the second consecutive year. Navigator overcame engine problems to reel in 266.50 lbs of Wahoo (11 Wahoo) to win the first prize category and an invitation to the Offshore World Championships to be held in Costa Rica in April 2024.

Running

In addition to all the water sports, running continues to increase in popularity. St. Maarten offers running in the form of short and long course relays, regularly scheduled 5k, 10k half marathons and even full distance marathons.

All the while track and field continues to attract and develop young talent. This year in Jamaica at the SSA/Grace Kennedy Boys and Girls Championships, St. Maarten's Carlos Brison won gold in the 1500-meter finals and bronze in the 800-meter final.

Padel ball

Other sports are doing well, too. Padel ball is one of the up and coming sports on the Friendly Island. SXM Padel added a third court to their facility in May. Top name players are visiting St. Maarten and there are tournaments every few weeks.

Golf

The Mullet Bay Golf Course continues to offer picturesque views, along with a nice walk and challenging greens.

Jan Peter Holtland, Andy Holmes and Keith Graham took top honours during the third annual Steve Mix Memorial Golf Tournament. The event was organised by the St. Maarten Golf Association (SMGA) and drew 12 teams.

The annual Concordia Cup golf tournament was held November 11 and 12. Started in 2005, this tournament is based on golf's "Ryder Cup" and pits Dutch side St. Maarten Golf Association (SMGA) against their Northern rivals. St. Martin won the Cup for the fifth year in a row.

Boxing

St. Maarten Kick boxer and MMA fighter/instructor Akeem Lewis (29) returned to the ring after almost a year away. On this comeback he fought and beat Enzo Audou, securing the World Kick-boxing Network (WKN) Amateur Heavy Weight

World Title.

Bodybuilding

Burnargis Browne, representing St. Maarten, won the men's physique competition at the Mr. Universe Pro Qualifier in Brazil. "Mr. Browne's exceptional dedication and commitment to his craft have undoubtedly paid off, as he was awarded a coveted pro card in the competition's "overall" category," said St. Maarten Bodybuilding & Fitness Federation President Shamire Connor.

Coaching

While athletes trained hard, coaches continued to further their knowledge. Among the many volunteer coaches attending courses and clinics, Shawn Blair and Soul Coffie completed the IBA (International Boxing Association) International One Star Coaching Course. The course was held live online from Switzerland, so Blair and Coffie had to be online from 3:00am until 7:00am St. Maarten time for eleven consecutive days, from July 2 to 12.

"We are working toward having qualified coaches in the schools in each district of the island so more youngsters can enjoy the sport," said Blair, who is the president of the St. Maarten National Boxing Federation.

Pool

Pool continues to be a sport moving out of bars and into the main light. Big 8-Ball and 9-Ball tournaments were featured almost once a month while small groups of players gather regularly for friendly games.

Taekwondo

The King Yen Taekwondo School led by St. Maarten Grand Master Theo Liu continues to thrive. Students travel abroad for international competitions and train locally to move up the belt ranking system toward the black belt.

The Good News

The good news is the RISC is scheduled to receive a face lift, or if you like a pitch throw down, starting in February. It is expected to be ready for action by March.

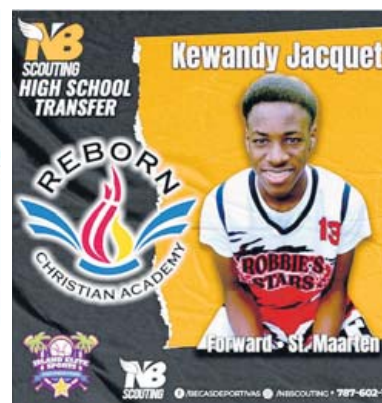
Despite some difficulties, sports on St. Maarten continue to grow. Athletes are competing in more events and producing better results. The outlook for Year 2024 is great!



SXM Padel Club announced the opening of its third Padel tennis court in May.



Ishaan Dhansinghani took first place in the St. Maarten Youth Tennis Tournament in April. He bested Paris Thomas in the final. Keyara Hamer was third. All participants received free membership into the Tennis Association, national ranking and their own World Tennis Number.



St. Maarten forward Kewandy Jacquet is the latest young athlete to receive an athletic scholarship to the United States. Kewandy received a full scholarship to Reborn Christian Academy in Kissimmee Florida. Jacquet is just one of several local athletes that have received an athletic scholarship due to the hard work of Island Elite Sports Foundation.



St. Maarten's Carlos Brison who won gold in the 1500-meter finals at the ISSA/GraceKennedy Boys and Girls Championships in Jamaica continued his impressive performance taking bronze in the 800-meter final.



Two undefeated teams faced each other to claim the 2023 Interscholastic Primary School Netball Championship. Methodist Agocic Center J.A. Gumbs met Hillside Christian School in the final at L.B. Scott Sports Auditorium in March. MAC JAG took the early lead 4-2 and maintained it throughout the whole match to win 17-10.



Four athletes from the King Yen Taekwondo school represented St. Maarten at the 30th Puerto Rico International Taekwondo Championship.

The group won six gold and a silver medal at the championship that featured 419 athletes. Their strong showing earned them an invitation to display their training to the world at the 2023 Han-Ma-Um Kukki Taekwondo Grand Festival in South Korea.



The Boardwalk Sports Park opened in June offering the public the opportunity to try out the fitness equipment and partake in a beach volleyball, beach football or bocce ball.

St. Maarten youngsters dominate regional and Leeward Islands teams

PHILIPSBURG--*The year 2023 was an active year for young cricketers, in which many of them featured prominently in the Leeward Islands and regional teams.*

For an island with just one cricket field, limited financial resources for development and substandard training facilities, to have 15 players selected for different teams around the region is a phenomenal achievement.

Keacy Carty is on the West Indies team, the Trinbago Knight Rider team and a Leeward Islands Hurricanes player,

Daniel Doram got selected for the Netherlands national team to tour South Africa and is a Leeward Islands Hurricane player, Nathan Edward, Michael Palmer, Chamiqueo Landefort, Tyanick Honore, Amarius Harris, Samuel Morton and Randell Longville were selected for the Leeward Islands U19 provisional team, Honore, Israel Morton and Devanand Singh were members of the Leeward Islands U17 team and Jethan Edward, Jaeden Bramble, Keon Maccow and Jeremiah Adai were selected for the Leeward Islands U15 provisional team.

Under mitigating circum-

stances, Coach Richie Singh toiled throughout the year with a set of enthusiastic youngsters, Development Officer Kern Saunders conducted a cricket academy from January to June, and Kiddies Cricket returned to just three schools from October to December.

All the youngsters trained in limited batting space because only two batting nets were operational for most of the year. However, Resources for Community Resilience (R4CR) sponsorship ensured that four additional batting nets were completed, and Kiddies Cricket was returned to the schools.

Keacy Carty achieved top

honours after securing a spot in the West Indies one-day team and a surprised but successful call-up to the Trinbago Knight Riders in the Caribbean Premier League (CPL). For the West Indies, Carty played nine innings for a top score of 87 against Sri Lanka and an overall average of 41.28. He also had an explosive CPL in which he came in as a late substitute but threw his hat in the ring for next season with two scorching innings of 83 and 38 in the semi-final and final, respectively.

Edward got picked for the second time to represent the West Indies U19. He became the first player from St. Maarten to be selected twice after his inaugural selection in 2022. The Youth World Cup begins on January 19 in South Africa.

The West Indies U19 team will play the featured match against the hosts on the opening day. After his second selection, Edward, in an invited comment with The Daily Herald, said, "This is a special year for us and when we win this World Cup, that would be a breakthrough for all of us. There's never a dull moment with the 2024 World Cup team, which gives me a strong feeling that we will do well in this upcoming World Cup. Having such good team chemistry makes you never want to leave the team, but eventually, we all will have to part ways after this World Cup. Hopefully, we'll meet back in future Windies endeavours."

Doram's selection to the Netherlands national team is another big gig for the 26-year-old left-arm spinner. At the age of 15, the tall, skilful spinner made his debut in the Dutch team, but just over 10 years later, he will be wearing the orange uniform again.

The highlight of 2023 for Doram was his outstanding figures of seven for 29 off 9.5 overs against Jamaica in the regional Super50 tournament in October. He will be very helpful to the Dutch team in South Africa on those hard, bouncy pitches.

Of the seven U19 players in the Leeward Islands provisional squad, five of them, Edward, Palmer, Harris, Landefort and Honore, were selected to be in the final team. However, Harris sustained an injury and had to be replaced just before the team travelled to St. Vincent. Last year, the players from St. Maarten helped the Lee-



Daniel Doram displays seven figures and the ball after collecting seven for 29 off 9.5 overs for the Leeward Islands Hurricanes against the Jamaica Scorpions in the regional Super50 in October.



Human Resources development. R4CR was instrumental in helping 10 coaches participate in the West Indies Level 1 coaching programme. The programme was completed over three days in early December. Junie Mitchum, Project Officer-Development with Cricket West Indies and local Development Officer Kern Saunders conducted the training session.

wards win the first championship after more than 15 years. However, this year, the team did not perform as expected. They won only one match out of five in the tournament.

All three U17 players who were selected for the Leeward Islands provisional team advanced to the main team. Honore, Israel Morton, and Singh had contrasting performances in the regional tournament in Trinidad. With his left-arm spin, Morton was a significant find for the Leeward Islands management, while Honore promised much but scored one half-century in five matches.

Jethan Edward was the lone U15 player from St. Maarten in the Leeward Islands team. For next year's tournament, two other players Jaeden Bramble and Keon Maccow, were chosen for the 22-man squad, which will be trimmed to 18 early next year. Edward is an improving leg spinner, Bramble is a wicketkeeper, and Maccow is a solid opening batsman.

During the year, R4CR rescued Cricket St. Maarten's developmental plans with a substantial financial injection that was geared toward fixing the damaged batting nets, human development,

and restoration of Kiddies Cricket in the schools. The nets were fully repaired by the end of November, and Kiddies Cricket has been in three schools since October.

In July, Bharo Raghu-bir took over the reins of Cricket St. Maarten as president. The new board has hit the wicket running and has so far executed a few projects to aid in the development of cricket.

There is a new energy at the cricket field. The new board organized the KFC Cup, which started in September and ended in December. The General Repairs Spartans emerged as the champions. Masters Cricket Club, a team with players over 40 years, reached their first final. However, they were outplayed by the younger Spartans. Ten teams competed in that tournament, which demonstrated that many people are still engaged in cricket.

The year ended on a high for Cricket St. Maarten, which argues well for 2024. Look out for more development and a wider pool of players going to Leeward Islands and the regional team from St. Maarten.



Nathan Edward created history when he became the first St. Maarten cricketer to be selected for the West Indies U19 team to play in two Youth World Cups. Edward is set to feature in the West Indies team from January 19 in South Africa.



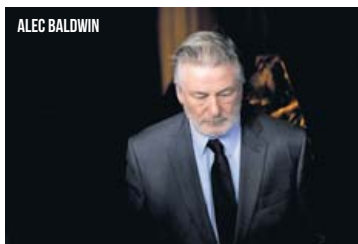
It's a redone batting net. Thanks to R4CR, Cricket St. Maarten was able to reconstruct its four batting nets, which were damaged during Hurricane Iram in 2017.

SHOWBIZ
YEAR IN REVIEWHollywood strikes,
Beatles last song,
'Swift effect'

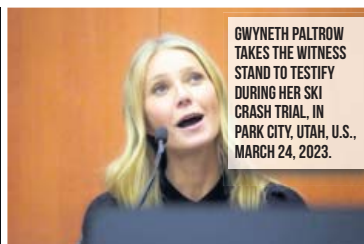
LONDON--From strikes paralyzing Hollywood to the Beatles releasing their last ever song, the world of entertainment provided many headlines this year.

Below are some of the biggest showbiz stories of 2023:

- Hollywood studios faced their first dual work stoppage in 63 years when writers and actors went on strike over higher compensation in the streaming TV era plus safeguards around the use of artificial intelligence, forcing them to halt many productions across the United States and abroad. Unions for both groups eventually reached agreements with major studios.
- The last Beatles song, featuring the voice of late member John Lennon and developed using artificial intelligence, was released.
- The Rolling Stones released "Hackney Diamonds", their first album of original material since 2005 and the first recording since drummer Charlie Watts died in 2021.
- Madonna was forced to delay the start of her career-spanning tour after being hospitalized in intensive care for a serious bacterial infection.
- Britney Spears released her memoir in which she said she had an abortion to end a pregnancy by fellow pop star Justin Timberlake while the two were dating.
- Actors Kevin Spacey and Gwyneth Paltrow and singer Ed Sheeran were among the famous names taking the stand in high profile trials. New Mexico prosecutors said they intend to recharge actor Alec Baldwin with involuntary manslaughter for the fatal shooting of "Rust" cinematographer Halyna Hutchins in 2021.
- Music superstars Taylor Swift and Beyoncé kicked off their hugely successful concert tours, and both brought films of them to cinemas. "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour" hauled in an estimated \$126 million-plus globally in its opening weekend, a boost for cinemas after the Hollywood strike prompted studios to delay releases for titles like "Dune: Part Two".
- Swift also made headlines for her personal life when she began dating Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce, sending sales for his jersey soaring and television ratings up as fans speculated on whether she would make an appearance at the player's games.
- Oscar winners Robert De Niro and Al Pacino became fathers again, aged 79 and 83 respectively.
- Famous names Tina Turner, Lisa Marie Presley, Harry Belafonte, Matthew Perry, Tom Sizemore, Julian Sands, Jeff Beck, Jane Birkin, Tony Benett, Sinéad O'Connor and Michael Gambon were among entertainment stars who died during the year.



ALEC BALDWIN



GWYNETH PALTROW TAKES THE WITNESS STAND TO TESTIFY DURING HER SKI CRASH TRIAL, IN PARK CITY, UTAH, U.S., MARCH 24, 2023.



SAG-AFTRA ACTORS AND WRITERS GUILD OF AMERICA (WGA) WRITERS WALK THE PICKET LINE OUTSIDE DISNEY STUDIOS IN BURBANK, CALIFORNIA, U.S., JULY 26, 2023.



BRITNEY SPEARS



MADONNA PERFORMS DURING THE 65TH ANNUAL GRAMMY AWARDS IN LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, U.S., FEBRUARY 5, 2023.



A PERSON HOLDS A PICTURE OF LISA MARIE PRESLEY AS MUSIC FANS ATTEND A PUBLIC MEMORIAL FOR SINGER LISA MARIE PRESLEY, THE ONLY DAUGHTER OF THE "KING OF ROCK 'N' ROLL," ELVIS PRESLEY, AT GRACELAND MANSION IN MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE, U.S. JANUARY 22, 2023.



OSCAR WINNERS JAMIE LEE CURTIS AND MICHELLE YEOH WATCH BACKSTAGE AS BRENDAN FRASER (UNSEEN) POSES WITH HIS OSCAR IN THE OSCARS PHOTO ROOM AT THE 95TH ACADEMY AWARDS IN HOLLYWOOD, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, U.S., MARCH 12, 2023.



LADY GAGA REACTS AS A PHOTOGRAPHER FALLS ON THE CHAMPAGNE-COLOURED RED CARPET, DURING THE OSCARS ARRIVALS AT THE 95TH ACADEMY AWARDS IN HOLLYWOOD, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, U.S., MARCH 12, 2023.



SINGER ED SHEERAN REACTS, AS HE SPEAKS TO THE MEDIA, AFTER HIS COPYRIGHT TRIAL AT MANHATTAN FEDERAL COURT, IN NEW YORK CITY, U.S., MAY 4, 2023.

READY FOR IT? SWIFT RULED POP CULTURE IN 2023. SHE WILL DOMINATE AGAIN IN 2024

LOS ANGELES--Pop superstar Taylor Swift rocked concert stages, cinemas, local economies - and even the Earth - in 2023. Swift's Eras Tour sold out stadiums and pumped millions of dollars into each city it visited. A movie version of the show lit up theaters, racking up \$250 million in ticket sales.

With 26 billion streams, Swift ranked as Spotify's most popular artist of the year. In July, the 33-year-old became the first female artist to have four albums on Billboard's top 10 list at the same time.

"She keeps leveling up," said Colin Stutz, news director at Billboard. He ranked Swift's achievements alongside musical elites such as The Beatles, Elvis Presley and Michael Jackson.

If Swift were a record label, Stutz said, the "Anti-Hero" singer would stand as the fourth largest in the U.S. by revenue from her touring, merchandise, streams and other sources. Time magazine named Swift its 2023 "Person of the Year."

"This is the proudest and happiest I've ever felt, and the most creatively fulfilled and free I've ever been," Swift told the magazine.

In 2023, the singer released re-recordings of two records - "Speak Now" and "1989" - as part of her effort to take control of her back catalog.

A Swift concert in Seattle caused a small earthquake. Thousands of dancing fans set off a nearby seismometer, registering the equivalent of a magnitude 2.3 quake.

For 2024, the Swift Effect will spread around the world as her tour hits Asia, Australia, Europe and Canada.

Why It Matters

Swift did not just rule the music business. She lifted local economies, encouraged voter registrations and brought more viewers to professional football.

The Eras Tour grossed more than \$900 million in ticket sales, Billboard estimates. The media outlet projects that will nearly double by the end of 2024 and surpass Elton John's Farewell Yellow Brick Road Tour as the highest-grossing tour in history.

Each stop by Swift brought an influx of Swifties who spent money on hotels, meals

and more. Celebrities and moms and dads also joined their superfan children for one of the hottest tickets of the year. While it is hard to reliably estimate Swift's economic impact, it was notable enough for the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia to cite a three-night Eras run as a driver of tourist traffic.

One contact told Fed researchers that May was "the strongest month for hotel revenue in Philadelphia since the onset of the pandemic, in large part due to an influx of guests for the Taylor Swift concerts," a July report said.

Two shows in Denver injected \$140 million into Colorado, local authorities estimate. Six nights near Los Angeles added \$320 million and 3,300 jobs to the area, according to the California Center for Jobs and the Economy.

Swift's impact had local politicians embracing her. "Mayor after mayor would rename their city for a day," said Arizona State University Professor Margaretha Bentley, Glendale, Arizona, for example, temporarily became Swift City.

Bentley is teaching a class next year called Taylor Swift (Public Policy Version). It will explore government through the lens of Swift, looking at topics such as her impact on voter registration. After Swift urged fans to register, Vote.org reported 35,000 signups. Harvard, Stanford and other colleges also offer courses on Swift's songwriting and influence.

In sports, Swift's high-profile romance with Kansas City Chiefs star Travis Kelce brought new viewers to football games. Sales of Kelce jerseys jumped 400% in one day, online seller Fanatics said.

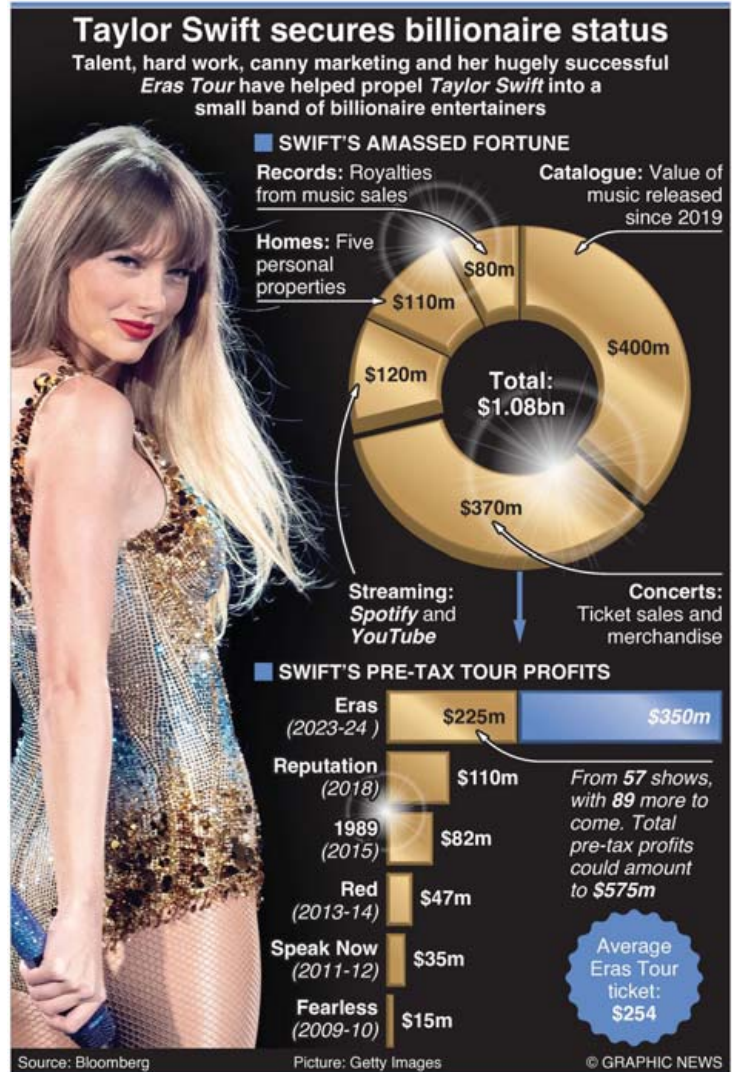
What It Means

For Next Year

While Swift was seemingly everywhere in 2023, her Eras Tour only spanned the U.S., Mexico, Brazil and Argentina. In February, it heads to Tokyo before swinging through Australia, Singapore and Europe. It wraps in Vancouver in December 2024.

Swift may be seen at February's Grammys, where her record "Midnights" will contend for album of the year.

The superstar also may release another re-recording, or two in the coming year, Stutz



said. A prolific songwriter, Swift could debut new material.

"To have this level of popularity sustained, and continue to grow, is pretty remarkable," Stutz said. "It will be interesting to see how long she's able to keep that success and what it looks like as she grows and matures."

SHOWBIZ

ROLLING STONES BAND MEMBERS MICK JAGGER, KEITH RICHARDS AND RONNIE WOOD ATTEND A LAUNCH EVENT FOR THEIR NEW ALBUM "HACKNEY DIAMONDS" AT HACKNEY EMPIRE IN LONDON, BRITAIN, SEPTEMBER 6, 2023.



ACTOR KEVIN SPACEY REACTS OUTSIDE SOUTHWARK CROWN COURT, AFTER HE WAS FOUND NOT GUILTY ON CHARGES RELATED TO ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL OFFENSES, IN LONDON, BRITAIN, JULY 26, 2023.

Last Farewells: Notable deaths of 2023



Rosalynn Carter

96. Wife of U.S. President **Jimmy Carter** transformed the role of First Lady as a key advocate for women's rights and mental health



Matthew Perry

54. Actor best known as wisecracking **Chandler Bing** in **Friends**, one of the most popular TV sitcoms of all time



Silvio Berlusconi

86. Brash billionaire media tycoon was Italy's longest-serving prime minister, in power for four terms between 1994 and 2011



Pervez Musharraf

79. Former general and Pakistan president became an influential figure in the struggle between militant Islamists and the West



Henry Kissinger

100. Former U.S. secretary of state who played a pivotal but controversial role in shaping American foreign policy during the Cold War



Barry Humphries

89. Australian comedian best known for his alter ego, **Dame Edna Everage** – an outlandish housewife from Melbourne



Sinéad O'Connor

56. Irish singer, songwriter and political activist shot to fame after her biggest hit, **Nothing Compares 2 U**, topped charts worldwide



Tina Turner

83. Pioneering pop icon found fame with husband **Ike** before going on to global solo success with hits like **The Best**



Harry Belafonte

96. Singer and actor who popularised calypso music in the 1950s and became a dynamic force in the U.S. civil rights movement



Raquel Welch

82. Actress who became an international sex symbol as a deerskin bikini-clad cavewoman in the 1966 film **One Million Years B.C.**



Bobby Charlton

86. One of football's all-time greats, Manchester Utd and England legend won World Cup, European Cup and Ballon d'Or



Glenda Jackson

87. Multi-award winning actress who gave up career to serve in UK Parliament for 23 years, before returning to acting at 80