Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Over the past three years the independent community group, Action Bequia has been quietly getting on with their self-appointed task of helping Bequia become an even more appealing place to live, work and visit. We chatted with Richard Roxburgh (R.R), Shavern Ollivierre (S.O) and David Harper (D.H) to find out what's been happening and discuss future plans.

Ins & Outs: First up, Richard Roxburgh. “Richard, you call yourself ‘the catalyst’, so tell us how it all started?”

R.R: “Well, when we first arrived here, it was obvious there were lots of things on the island that needed fixing but for one reason or another weren’t getting done. The most obvious was restoring the beautiful beaches of Princess Margaret (Tony Gibons) and on round to Lower Bay. It was still being mentioned in all the brochures as one of the island’s favourite attractions, yet nobody seemed to have any plans to do anything about rebuilding it, so we determined to fix it. Thus, in 2011, ‘Action Bequia’ was born, centered around a Coordination Committee. However, it’s not. A huge amount of effort goes into raising funds and doing the actual work, the result of which can also be seen on our website which is updated regularly. The energy and goodwill we have encountered from many individuals over the last three years have been inspirational and more than overcome the skeptical and negative response from the few naysayers who greeted our founding. Some have argued that our major projects should be a government responsibility, but Bequia has no tax raising powers or budget. The SVG Government has limited resources and many competing priorities. Our major projects are driven by that reality.”

I&O: “So, having completed the Princess Point Trail in 2014, what’s next on the cards for 2015?”

R.R: “There are two, firstly a proper recycling scheme for Bequia which is environmentally urgent and secondly, an effort to address the mosquito problem which has become a major threat to the island’s health and economy. These two are not only bigger than anything we have attempted so far but require close collaboration with the SVG Government. Let the two people leading these projects, Shavern Ollivierre (S.O) and David Harper (D.H) tell you about them…”

S.O: “I’m the project coordinator for the Recycling and the Reduction of Greenhouse Gas Emissions scheme. Action Bequia is working in collaboration with the Central Water and Sewage (CWSA) to implement this project that involves community collection facilities, plus a fully staffed and equipped recycling operation at CWSA’s Bequia site. On completion, we anticipate a significant impact on rubbish blighting our environment and much reduced landfill requirements. We have got off to a tremendous start with strategic grant funding from the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF SGF) an initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Action Bequia does have to raise matching funds a huge task but one which we are confident of fulfilling.”

I&O: “Sounds ambitious but wonderful if you can pull it off. So, turning to David Harper, what’s Action Bequia intending to do about the mosquito problem and the diseases they bring such as Chikungunya and Dengue?”

D.H: “Just to put this issue into perspective, the first case of Chikungunya in the Americas and Caribbean occurred in December 2013. Ten months later close to one million people in 36 countries in the region have been infected. As mosquito control methods are often controversial it might be tempting for Action Bequia to steer clear but the health and economic threat to the population of a visitor based economy are too serious to be ignored. Conventional control methods certainly help but don’t eradicate sufficient of the mosquito population to contain the health threats. We are now looking at a method that involves the breeding and release of high volumes of sterile male mosquitoes on a regular basis. Males don’t bite, but they follow the females everywhere they go and impregnate them. Females, once impregnated by these sterile males then spend the rest of their lives having eggs that don’t produce adults. The result can be eradication levels high enough to stop epidemics. Tests in several countries have shown the technique to be effective and safe.

As genetic modification is involved, use of these sterile males requires government approval that we don’t yet have. It’s also expensive in the first year but feel that ongoing epidemics will prove much more costly and cause unacceptable suffering. Other charitable bodies have indicated their willingness to join with Action Bequia to fund this effort.”

I&O: “Richard, is there anything else you would like to add?”

R.R: “Yes, there are three things we want to emphasize.

1. We are very goal orientated. We do make changes rather than talkers. We really do believe that ‘Actions Speak Louder than Words’. We therefore want to thank ‘Ins & Outs magazine’ for their support in giving us this voice.

2. We stand by what we do. So we reserve funds to help maintain the Belmont Walkway and Princess Point Trail for repairs in the almost inevitable event of their being breached at some stage by excessive surges. Similarly, where a project is incomplete, like the Port Elizabeth Drain which has ongoing issues with the flushing system, Mike Connell will carry on until it is done satisfactorily.

3. None of this happens by magic. Thank heavens for the generous US based foundations and UK based individuals who have given substantially in the past. Also, to the numbers of smaller donors who chipped in early on. All of us are acknowledged on our website www.actionbequia.org together with advice on how to donate. Alternatively, just email Richard Roxburgh at rrox1352@aol.com or call (784) 593 7485.”