

Roots and Reef

15 June 2011

FREE

Sitting On The Beach - Watching The Waves

By Charles Leslie Jr.
Placencia Village Council Chairman

Letter from a Concerned Parent

(While Roots and Reef is an environmental newspaper, I believe respect for our environment and natural resources comes from our parents, just as all of our values do. Because I believe parents are the key to the future of our Village, I decided to submit the following letter and discussion to Roots and Reef for I believe the issues raised are very important for our community, not only socially and culturally, but also environmentally.)

Concerned Parent: *"I have a concern about some of our Standard 4, 5, and 6 students here in Placencia, as well as some of our 1st and 2nd Formers in high school. There have been quite a few incidents that have happened in the village, and we haven't been aware of them until lately. It seems like some of our students are getting into fights with each other, using sticks and knives.*

"Seems as if they have a lot of anger in them, not to mention they are all related in some way. Now I know we as parents are trying to do what we can to control them as much as possible. But when they are on the street, the street influence is very high. I would like to know if the Village Council, along with the Police Department and the Principal from the school, can or will be able to come up with some type of punishment? Maybe it could be in the form of labour, as we all know there is a lot to be done in the Village, such as cleaning, etc. If they should violate the laws set in place for mischievous acts, our youths would have to assist in the cleaning of the Village or what ever you guys come up with.

"I fear that someone could get seriously hurt soon, and it's not till then we would react to that. For example, there was a young student who got beaten by young kids in Independence the other day. Those kids were ages 12 to 15. It's a shame the youths today don't want to work. Maybe putting them to work will have them reconsider getting into mischief.

"One more thing. It would be nice to just have one of the police to be a part of this instead of all the police. We know they too can be a little disrespectful themselves, and we wouldn't want them to take advantage of our kids."

My response: I believe that this is a social problem that no form of punishment will solve and will only make matters more difficult. My analogy would be giving a child an Advil for pain caused by an open gash on the leg. The best way to help the child would be to clean the wound, stitch it, and provide proper medication and allow a recuperation period and then teach them to be careful in life.

(cont. on page 5)

Cruise 2: The Sequel

... The government of Belize should not approve a new port of call (port designation), contract or agreement with cruise lines, developers or their affiliates for operation in the Placencia Peninsula. Not only is there widespread resistance to the establishment of cruise tourism in Placencia, as demonstrated by public sentiment, there is also abundant and compelling evidence that communities in the surrounding area are ill prepared for cruise ship arrivals.

(From an independent consultant's report commissioned by the Government of Belize on the viability of cruise ships in Placencia, issued to the public on 18 March 2011)

The above report firmly confirmed the voices of the people who stood up on 21 October 2010 at a government held meeting in Placencia and overwhelmingly declared: NO CRUISE SHIPS IN PLACENCIA.

This report straightforwardly confirmed the voices of the 335 people eligible to vote in Village elections who signed a petition in November 2010 again affirming: NO CRUISE SHIPS IN PLACENCIA. (367 people voted in the last Placencia village Council election.)

On 21 March 2011, the Chief Executive Officer of the Belize Tourism Board, Lindsay Garbutt, stated at a public media conference that:

I think this government is known for accepting rational recommendations; the results of these recommendations have been shared and I think he [Prime Minister Dean Barrow] has said that he is going to respect the results of this recommendation as far as the development of a cruise ship port in Placencia is concerned.

The Ministry of Tourism and the BTB went into this consultation with an open mind. We said from the beginning that it was not a done deal, and that we would carefully, based on a known and respected consultant, go through a careful process and that we would respect whatever the result of that consultation is, so in saying that the consultation is not recommending any cruise ship development in Placencia Peninsula, we are prepared to respect that.

On 22 March 2011, the Belize Tourism Board held a public meeting in Placencia Village to announce its acceptance of the results of the consultant's report recommending against cruise ship tourism in Placencia.

One would think the headlines for this Roots and Reef would be VICTORY: THE PEOPLE ARE HEARD--NO CRUISE SHIPS IN PLACENCIA.

However, on 30 March 2011, this clear public and government mandate for no cruise ships in Placencia was already being challenged by a group of moneyed investors. Just eight days after BTB's public meeting in Placencia, Out Island Construction and Development Company Limited (OICD) presented a proposal for a cruise ship port designation in Placencia to a limited group of members of the Placencia Tour Guide Association (PTGA). The proposal was amended on 11 May 2011. The title of the proposal is:

Proposal from Out Island Construction and Development Company Ltd. and the People of Placencia for the Joint Creation and Management of a Visitors Welcome Center in the Village of Placencia

Roots and Reef obtained a copy of the proposal on 26 May 2011 and posted it on the Internet the same day. The proposal had not yet then been submitted to the Placencia Village Council for consideration. (We also understand that most tour guides have not yet seen the proposal.)

The proposal can be downloaded from www.placenciadocuments.info/cruise2.pdf. Printed copies of the proposal are also available at the office of PCSD next to the Worship Center on the main road.

Neither this proposal nor any other proposal can minimize, change, or negate the conclusion reached after an open, legal, and transparent process, involving the people and the GOB. The simple fact still remains: the people, the independent study commissioned by GOB, and GOB's representatives' public comments concluded: NO CRUISE SHIPS IN PLACENCIA.

The people are opposed to cruise ships for some very basic and simple reasons:

Ok, let's put it right on the line here: Cruise ships are in the business of making money, pure and simple. The fact that this "new" proposal surfaced in the immediate wake of what we thought was the resolution and conclusion of the subject of cruise ships in Placencia proves these investors could care less about what the people want. These investors think their money can and will speak. They invested their money, and by golly, they will prevail over the people. Come hell or high water, these investors are intentionally ignoring and attempting to by-pass public sentiment.

NO AMOUNT OF MONEY TRUMPS THE VOICES OF THE PEOPLE!

As already concluded by GOB's independent report, southern Belize simply cannot handle cruise ship tourism either culturally, socially, economically or environmentally..

The purpose of a cruise ship company (and an investor's investment) is to make as much money as possible. That's why this latest proposal still includes a Tourism Village. It's now called a "Visitors Centre" and doesn't include a hotel, but it includes everything else in the original Tourism Village concept. Why? Because money made from "tourism villages" our "visitors centres" and tours offered to cruise ship passengers is a substantial amount of a cruise line's profit (and the profit of investors in a cruise ship operation).

Further, no cruise ship company is named in this proposal – or even mentioned in the proposal. A cruise ship company coming to Placencia would have a contract with the GOB and need not agree to any of the conditions the investors in the proposal promise to Placencia. (Ownership, control and management of the port is not addressed in the proposal – a BIG omission.) We have all seen the track record of the GOB in negotiating with cruise ship companies. We know the "investors" are in it for the money. So, why should we trust the investors, GOB, or cruise lines to act in the best interests of Placencia?

Plus, trust already seems to have been breached. The proposal promises transparency, but still does not tell us who the "investors" are, or why this proposal was presented to a few Placencia tour guides, but not to the Village Council, the BTIA, SEA or any other local organization – or to the public itself. Nor does it provide any information about which tour guides it was presented to and when.

(cont. on page 2)



Way to Go, Rachel!

Most everybody who works in tourism or fishes for a living knows Dr. Rachel Graham through her initial whale shark research that led to the declaration of the Gladden Spit Marine Reserve and was used to draft Belize's whale shark tourism regulations. Rachel also conducted Placencia's very first whale shark tour guide training program in February and March 2001 and has conducted many whale shark training programs since way back then.

Well, great news – for Rachel's research on sharks and rays, she recently won the Gold Whitney Award for 2011, one of the most prestigious in the world for grassroots nature conservation. The award was presented to Rachel by the Princess Royal (Princess Anne) at the Royal Geographical Society in London on 12 May 2011.



Some of Rachel's most current work in Belize focuses on adult and childhood education about sharks and rays. For example, to help Belize children understand the role of sharks and rays as critical parts of a healthy marine environment, Rachel and artist, Marc Dando, have developed a series of cartoon characters, one of which is shown above. (More of Marc Dando's work as a wildlife illustrator can be found at www.wildlifeillustrator.com)

Older students and adults can find a lot of good information from Rachel and her colleagues about sharks on the Shark Project Website at <http://belizesharks.org/>, sponsored by the Wildlife Conservation Society.



For example, did you know that eating too much shark or king mackerel can cause depression, memory loss and seriously affect brain development of babies while still in the womb? It can, and toxic mercury that accumulates in their bodies in the reason. In fact, the

United States Food and Drug Agency says that pregnant women should not eat any shark or king mackerel at all because of the risk of mercury to unborn children.

And, still more information associated with Rachel's work with sharks and rays can be found on the Shark Project's Facebook page, www.facebook.com/Belizesharks and at www.wildlifetracking.org, a Website which allows people all over the world to track the location of two Belize whale sharks named Caracol and Palacio.

Plus, the Gold Whitney Award doesn't just honor Rachel's work with sharks and rays, it also provides her with funding to continue her research – a very good thing since there's still so much to learn about how sharks and rays help in keeping our fishing grounds productive – not to mention the impact they have on our marine tourism.

So, congratulations Rachel – great job!

Native Critters of the Placencia Peninsula

The Gray Fox

By: Adrian Vernon



As a child I was always fascinated by these little dogs that lived wild running all around Placencia.

When we went hunting for birds, scavenging for fruits or just out having fun in the bush, we often came across them, but they were always too fast to catch.

I sure wanted one for a pet, and as we got older we learned how to catch them.

But, when I brought one home, I was not allowed to keep it because my mom and dad knew that wild animals should be in the wild and not kept as pets.

Studying later, I found out that these little creatures have been living wild since the mid Pliocene epoch some 3.6 million years ago after the first fossils were found in Arizona alongside a Giant Sloth. This little dog-like mammal was definitely better off in the wild.

These little grey foxes go by the local name Zorro – and they are amazing little creatures. They can climb trees, and they eat things like insects, rats, small birds, fruit, berries and vegetables. The babies are called "cubs," or "kits" or "pups" and the females are called "vixens." The males are called "reynards" or "dogs". They only have one litter a year and can have up to four pups in a litter.

Grey foxes are found from the southern half of North America, to Venezuela and Colombia. However, their existence is being threatened. Some are sold illegally as pets, and here on the Peninsula, even though we still see quite a few of these foxes, we must realize that if we continue development without consideration for our natural environment, we may lose them and many other creatures that make our homes fascinating and beautiful.

We need to protect our wild critters on the Peninsula.

Cruise 2 -The Sequel

(Cont'd from pg. 1)

Another very serious question we must ask and this proposal does not answer is **whether our national government is aware of this proposal. And, if it is, did it know about the proposal before its public meeting on 22 March 2011 when it affirmed opposition to cruise ship tourism in Placencia?**

And, if the Government of Belize is aware of this proposal, does it still stand behind the people's opposition to cruise ships in Placencia?

The new cruise ship proposal is transparent in one aspect, though. It tells us that the same group of investors who are behind this second proposal believed that Placencia did not have the power (or possibly the right) to say no to cruise ships.

As explained in the current proposal, the land at the Point for the previously proposed cruise ship village was purchased by "locally vested developers" with a loan from US investors at an interest rate of 10% with a term of one year plus 10 days.

The loan was to be repaid within this time period because the developers and investors deemed that this period was enough time for the Port designation to have been granted thereby creating availability of new capital for repayment to the US investors.

Just one year (and ten days) was all they thought it would take for them to complete a deal that would change the very nature of not only Placencia, but also a good part of southern Belize.

However, it seems that the investors miscalculated the intelligence of local communities, because one year turned out not to be long enough, and the local developers turned over control of the land to the US investors on 10 March 2011 – eight days before the release of the consultant's report recommending against cruise ship tourism in Placencia – and only TWENTY days before this proposal was first presented to some members of the Placencia Tour Guide Association.

Read the proposal for yourself, ponder it, and make up your own mind.

Haven't we already expressed ourselves on cruise ships in our own backyard? Isn't it time for outside moneyed investors to respect the people?

What part of NO do the moneyed investors not understand?
NO MEANS NO!

Again, the proposal can be downloaded from www.placenciadocuments.info/cruise2.pdf, or paper copies can be picked up at the PCSD office by the Worship Centre on the main road.

Pick up your FREE copy of

Stand Up, Speak Up—A Guide to Public Participation in Belize

At the PCSD Office next to the Worship Center.

A Day In The Life: Aaron Krohn

In listening, there is learning. With that in mind, *Roots and Reef* kicks off a new feature: "A Day in the Life".

Spend a day here, with your neighbor, your friend, your colleague. Learn what it's like to walk in his or her shoes.

Would you like to share one of your days with Roots and Reef? Stop in the PCSD office on the road next to the Worship Center, or call Adrian at 523-3587 to set up an interview. Yes, we are listening.

Standing on the shore and watching those dive boats full of tourists go by, have you ever wished you could work on one of those boats? Sounds like fun, doesn't it? Well, meet Aaron Krohn, who is a dive instructor for Avadon Divers, which recently was honored as Tour Operator of the Year by the Belize Tourism Board. (Aaron has been a dive instructor for four years.)



His day begins at five a.m. No time for breakfast, he grabs a few things to get him through the day, hops on his bike and is at work by 5:30 AM.

Aaron says: "My first task of the day is to prepare the boat for our 18-25 diving or snorkeling guests. With three to five staff working, we prep and haul all the dive gear for guests and staff, including regulators, weight belts, BCDs (buoyancy control devices) jackets, masks, snorkels, fins, wetsuits and tanks. We haul fifty to sixty tanks onto the boat, and each tank weighs about fifty pounds.

"I begin sizing our guests up with appropriate gear, with their comfort in mind, but more importantly, their safety. Diving means two things: safety and fun, in that order. I am frequently the person who briefs them on important safety guidelines, such as location of life jackets, where to safely sit on the boat, and even some real practical things like how the onboard toilet operates.

"Depending on where we are going for that day, it can take us anywhere from 1½ hours to 3½ hours to reach our destination.

"We take this time to brief any students who are on board. First time divers require more attention, and I take the time to review with them the materials they have already studied, and familiarize them with the gear we have on board.

"Only after this orientation can I finally eat my own packed breakfast, usually oatmeal and fruit.

"About fifteen minutes before we reach a dive site, we give a dive briefing including basics like not standing on corals, not touching anything, and not kicking up sand with their fins to avoid smothering corals. Then we start helping everyone get in the water."

Now the fun begins.

"Having a sense of humor really helps on this job. Getting people into the water can be like herding cats. Some people are ready to go, others not so much. My job often involves giving more hesitant divers a little bit of direction so that they can enter the sea with confidence.

"If I have students, when we get below, I kneel in a sandy area away from corals and sea grass beds and work with the students on the skills assigned to each training dive, such as clearing a mask of water, and recovering a regulator if it gets knocked or pulled from a diver's mouth.

"Guiding certified divers is usually more straightforward. I usually just lead them along the reef wall (which looks like the edge of an underwater cliff) and point out interesting things for them to look at. All the while, I am monitoring their depth, air consumption and making sure they're not disturbing marine life.

"If it is a two-tank dive day, after we return to the boat I help prepare the sandwiches to serve for lunch when we get back to the boat.

"If it is a three-tank dive day, lunch break comes after the second dive, and Myrtle's typical Belizean meal of rice and beans and fish balls is quickly and gratefully devoured.

"Dishwashing duty is shared by the crew, although I often find myself teaching compass usage to students during this break.

"After lunch we go for one more dive, and then we start to head home. Depending on where we are, the ride home may begin anywhere from midday to 3 pm. After all gear has been rinsed and hung up, I sometimes take a nap on the engine hatch. If not, I may be filling out paperwork for students that I have worked with during the day.

"Once back at the dock, the crew unloads the boat, this time removing those 50 tanks, rinses the gear, and then we wash down the entire boat. All this usually takes about an hour and a half. (cont. in next column)

Make Us Proud



Sometimes an individual achieves a goal so wonderful that the whole community feels a profound sense of pride and even responsibility for that person's success.

Alexis Caballero, son of Placencia's medical doctor, Dr. Alexis Caballero and Lloydia Westby Caballero, has done exactly that.

Alexis beat out approximately thirty other qualified students from around Belize and won a two year fully paid scholarship to attend United World College (UWC) in Maastricht, Netherlands.

UWC is an international school, drawing students from around the world. Here he will finish his college studies and earn an associate degree.

Alexis moved to Belize a few short years ago from Havana, Cuba to live with his father. Not speaking a word of English, he was soon one of the top two students in his class at St. John's Primary School. He received 84% on his Primary School Exam (PSE), the highest score in his class. For the past three years, Alexis has consistently been on the Honor Roll at Independence High School.

Alexis credits his success to his family, school, and his many friends throughout the community.

"Everyone was so helpful to me when I first reached here, especially Lloydia, who spent so much time helping me with my homework. I love to play team sports such as football and softball. Chemistry is my favorite subject, and when I finish my two years at UWC, I would like to apply to a university and study medicine. My father has been a good role model for me, and I would like to follow in his footsteps and become a doctor, too."

Alexis was playing softball with his team in San Pedro when he received the phone call of his acceptance to UWC.

"I couldn't talk at all, I was so excited to hear the good news!"

Alexis leaves in August for his new educational journey, but plans on returning to Placencia for the holidays and he states proudly: "Belize is my home. I love Belize. I am on Facebook and I look forward to keeping in touch with all my wonderful Placencia friends."

We all wish Alexis the very best in his international studies, and we thank him for making us all proud of his accomplishment!

WHO SAYS WE CAN'T WIN?

Point your finger at any spot on the globe, and most likely, you will find someone like you who cares a great deal about his backyard, his environment. No, we in Placencia are not alone in our struggles to preserve our natural resources and our way of life. And we are not alone when the peoples' voices are heard and finally respected by the government.

Clear across the planet, in Mongolia, a poor semi nomadic livestock herder named Tsetsegee Munkhbayer saw how unregulated and outdated mining practices were threatening the waterways in his country, drying up scarce and precious water sources for both humans and livestock.

Tsetsegee attended village council meetings, eventually being elected village chairman. He confronted his government officials, and with support of the local people, they successfully helped to stop the destructive mining operations.

Yes, substitute "cruise ships" for "destructive mining operations" and this does sound familiar to us Placencia folk, doesn't it?

Tsetsegee now heads the Onggi River Movement (ORM), a grassroots organization he co-founded in 2001 to protect and restore the Onggi River in Mongolia. Devoting himself full time to working with ORM, Tsetsegee convinced the Mongolian government to increase and enforce mining regulations and begin environmental restoration. In May, 2006, the Mongolia Parliament passed the Law on Minerals to regulate mining and protect the country's waterways.

So the next time we are face to face with our government, let's remind ourselves that our struggle is universal, that we are not struggling alone. Each one of us on this planet has a responsibility to protect and fight for our environment.

"We cannot let bottomless human consumption shape nature's fate. It is our fate, after all."—Tsetsegee Munkhbayer.

"On a short day, I can leave work at about 3pm. An average day finishes at about 6:30pm. A long day starts at 4:30am and sometimes does not finish until 8pm!

"How do I feel at the end of the day? Utterly spent.

"But, I often feel really fulfilled and satisfied when I have helped a beginner diver overcome a fear, or thrilled by an amazing sighting in the Sea."

THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST MANGROVE FORESTS STARTS WITH A GREEN LINE

By Anne-Marie McNeil
a Peninsula Community Member



I joined Adrian Vernon, his brother Jerome, some ladies who "love planting things" and over 15 kids from our local school, Saint John's Anglican School, in a project to replant mangrove along a section of the lagoon shoreline of the Placencia Peninsula this last Friday 13 May, 2011.

Mangrove replanting is an important exercise, given what has happened with the massive removal of mangrove over last 5 years alone from the Placencia Peninsula and on some inner lagoon islands. Thinking that this might be an interesting adventure, I didn't mind getting my hands and feet muddy for such a worthy cause. So, with booties on my feet and a spade in hand, I headed for the meet-

ing place that morning.

In three 25-foot boats, our group set out from the MNM fuel dock for one of the islands to the back behind the canal that runs past the fuel dock.

Where the boats put us ashore was clearly an area that had been stripped of mangrove some time ago, yet there were hundreds of mangrove seedlings growing and trying to make a comeback.

Adrian got everyone's attention and explained what we were supposed to do. He told us that we would be gathering seedlings from the island, and that we shouldn't worry about removing them as the owners of the island had plans to remove the seedlings and other larger mangrove growth and dispose of them all anyway.

He gave us instructions on how to remove the seedlings without damaging the root system, and which were the best ones to look out for. He explained that we needed

to gather red mangrove seedlings, and he showed us what they looked like. This is where the real education in mangrove identification came in.

Adrian carefully showed us what each species of mangrove looks like, from red to white and to black, and pointed out their characteristics. He even pointed out a fourth kind which everyone knows as Buttonwood. As we all set to the task of gathering seedlings and young plants, Adrian walked around encouraging us and the kids with fascinating information about mangrove. It was truly a heart-warming experience to see the children so interested and enthusiastic under Adrian's gentle tutelage.

Hot sun and brackish water surrounded us as we gathered over 200 seedlings. When we had loaded them all in one of the boats, we made our way to the chosen shoreline for planting. It happened to be the north side of the Peninsula Club development opposite Chabil Mar. This area had previously been stripped of its mangrove forest and filled in to create this development. The fill soil from this area, if left alone, would continue to wash into the lagoon and be eroded away. The land needed its mangroves back to survive.

Adrian, once again, got our attention to instruct us in the planting procedures. He showed us how far from the waterline and how far apart we should plant them. We teamed up and worked like a production line planting all the seedlings and young mangrove plants we had brought. The children's energy was not flagging as they raced to beat each other to get the seedlings in. In just over an hour, all plants had a home, with their roots carefully placed in spacious shoreline dugouts, lovingly filled with the sandy soil, and hand patted down. When all was done we looked at our masterpiece and realized that it made a beautiful new green line along what was a barren and eroding shoreline.

This was a truly inspiring moment. I looked at the children who started to play and swim, and thought what a community could do together. I thought that if 20 community members got together and did this exercise every month for 2 years alone, in 5 years from now, we'd have revitalized our mangrove growth along the lagoon side of the Peninsula by as much 50%.

The seedlings we planted last Friday will be almost 10 feet high in 5 years. This will help to protect the Peninsula's shoreline from damage by hurricane and boat traffic in the years to come. It will also revitalize the fish nurseries, allowing larger areas for young fish to hide and grow. The expanded mangrove growth will help filter more pollutants from the Lagoon water, allowing our sea grass beds to rejuvenate faster, thus expanding the manatee habitat. It will truly be good for the soul of all, for the soul of Placencia. Let's see what we can do together!

Positive Changes: Placencia Lagoon



During the last four years, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has worked along with Adrian Vernon and Tim Smith on several different projects involved in improving the health of Placencia Lagoon to preserve this vitally important link between our rivers and our reef.

Adrian, Tim and WWF chose to take up this challenge, even though they knew it would be a long and difficult process. They understood how much our communities and people's livelihoods depend on a healthy Lagoon.

Their thorough assessment of sea grass in the middle Lagoon produced a very dismal conclusion: without change, in five years our Lagoon would be dead.

But, today, Adrian, Tim and WWF are very glad to report that for the first time in many years, on calm days, the bottom of the Lagoon is visible from the surface and Santa Maria Creek no longer stinks. Where once much of the sea grass on the floor of the Lagoon had disappeared, now small patches are coming back, and they are even seeding and flowering. With the increase in sea grass, manatees and dolphins have once again been sighted as far north as Haul Over Point.

But, Tim, Adrian and WWF aren't taking the credit for these amazing transformations. Instead, each of them lays these successes at the doors of the people on the Placencia Peninsula -- the developers who have left their mangrove buffers intact and replanted what they initially destroyed -- the people who have designated mangroves as private reserves -- the shrimp farmers who have planted mangroves to help clean their effluents, found ways to use less water and spent money on strengthening their infrastructure -- and, of course, each member of our Peninsula communities who supported and participated in these programs.

Thanks to the dedication of Tim, Adrian and WWF, we now know that it only takes a few steps in the right direction for the Peninsula to achieve positive change -- we also know that if we make these issues our own, as a community, how much more positive change can we create.

NOTICE

PCSD Office Information

Location: next to The Worship Center on the main road

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DEVELOPMENT OUTLINE FOR PLACENCIA LAGOON



Sitting on the Beach, Watching the Waves

(cont. from page 1)

In this scenario the proverbial cleaning and stitching can only be done by parents actually parenting their children by establishing authority, setting examples and strict disciplining.

My parents were very strict with the friends I kept, what I was exposed to on television and other media. I was 17 years old and could not stay out after 10 p.m. Don't get me wrong-- I got into all the mischief and trouble like most young persons, but my parents always kept me in check. If it was not for them, especially my mom, I would have fallen out of school at the Primary School level and would have taken a very different path in life and one I am certain would not have been good.

Today, baby makers – I believe you have to earn the right to be called a ‘parent’ - have no clue, it seems, on what it means to be a parent. Today baby makers are more than happy to leave their children in front of a television; completely unmonitored, or in front of a computer. Parents seem more than happy and relieved when their children are at school, even happier when Grandma or Grandpa takes the children for a few days or permanently. I see too many parents wandering the streets at late hours in the night and I am exasperated when I see the children of these same parents on the streets, as well.

I witness young parents all excited about being pregnant. When the baby is born; it's all joys for a few months. But, a year later, reality sets in and I see that same young parent walking down the street dragging, yelling and swatting a scared, wailing child.

I believe these young parents find it difficult to realize and accept that party time is over; hanging out with your friends when you want, is over. A child needs undivided attention and a child costs a lot of money. To sum it up; you have to give up your current way of life, thinking and behaviour to be a good parent...and most are not prepared to make these very, very serious life altering changes.

I must divert a bit and say that it is sad to see so many single mothers out there. If you can't support your child and be there for your child; do not call yourself a man – any male can make a baby, but a real man takes care of his children.

I reiterate these sentiments because I know how significant a role my parents played in my life in becoming who I am today. The seed of my moral and ethical values was planted by my parents; they watered it the best they could. I would have been a very, very different person without the guidance and parenting of Mara Mayen and Charles Leslie Sr.

Parents need to think back to when they were children. Think how much you depended on your parents to be there for you; to guide you; to tell you about all the workings of life the best they could; to protect you and make you feel safe and loved. If these values are not instilled by parents; children will grow up feeling neglected, unguided, frustrated and they will lash out.

Too many parents take their personal frustration out on their children. They are too selfish; forgetting how impressionable children are, how delicate their emotions and minds are.

Sit down and think about it for a second; put one and one together and it will dawn on you that your child's behaviour may be directly linked with your behaviour; your every action is being imprinted on your child's psyche.

Smokey Joe – may he rest in peace – used to write a weekly column for the Amandala. He wrote hard hitting truths about the source of the social degradation of our society and it always pointed to parents NOT parenting their children. His famous closing lines were, “Children, it is 8 p.m. Do you know where your parents are? Parents, it is 8 p.m. Do you know where your children are?” These two questions now resonate in my mind on a daily basis, especially now that I have a 20 month old daughter.

If you are not prepared to give up your current way of life and be completely selfless; do not make a baby. And, if you are prepared to do so; make sure you remind yourself of that on a daily basis – you are bringing a human life into this world and as a parent it is your duty, out of love, to make sure that your child gets proper guidance, to grow up as a productive member of society.

As adults we are all parents of all children on the planet. Nothing in this life is guaranteed except for death. Our impression, as parents/adults today, will be our legacy and the zeitgeist of tomorrow's generation of adults.

Sit down and talk to your children, give them a big hug and tell them you love them and you will always be there for them and you will keep them safe. Anything that you wish to change in your child, first examine it and see whether it is not something that you could change in yourself and remember, don't try to be perfect, just try to be a good parent.

It's not only children who grow. Parents do too. As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching us to see what we do with ours. I can't tell my children to reach for the sun. All I can do is reach for it, myself. Joyce Maynard

Grilled Chicken & Honeydew Salad

By: *Adrian Vernon*

- 1/3 cup light mayonnaise
- 1 tbsp. rice wine vinegar
- 1-2 tbsp. fresh chopped sweet basil
- 2 ½ tsp. brown sugar, divided
- 1 ¼ tsp garlic, chopped
- 1 tsp. cracked pepper
- 1 ¼ lb. boneless, skinless chicken breast halves
- 1 cup small honeydew melon balls or cubes
- 1 large green onion, chopped
- 1/3 cup chopped pecans (or favorite nut), roasted

Preheat grill to medium. In a medium bowl blend mayonnaise, rice wine vinegar, ½ tsp. brown sugar, cracked pepper and salt to taste. Cover and chill.

Blend the remaining 2 tsp. brown sugar and garlic in a small bowl. Rub chicken evenly with sugar mixture. Grill, covered, 8-12 minutes, turning once. Remove when juices run clear. Cool slightly.

Coarsely chop or shred chicken. Add chicken, melon and green onions to dressing mixture. Serve immediately or chill before serving. (SERVES 4)

Principal's Report

Outside of the family, St. John's Primary School is the heart and soul of our youth in Placencia. Our school not only teaches basic learning skills, but frames our children to become educated, thinking adults. What happens to our community and our country depends on concerned, informed, and actively involved citizens.

Roots and Reef is pleased to include a report from Ms. Martinez, principal of St. John's Primary School.

If anyone is interested in learning more, getting involved, donating supplies, or giving financial or voluntary support, please contact Ms. Martinez at 632-7919 or louburnbrown@yahoo.com.

What's happening at St. John Memorial School?

The school year is coming to an end, and April was a busy month at St. John's Primary School, Placencia.

Our long awaited preschool is currently under construction on school property, and will be completed by end of June 2011. We look forward to greeting all our preschoolers with a fresh new building in September!

Our staff, students, and community came together to raise funds to help pay for the medical expenses incurred by some of our students who were involved in a serious car accident. Our biggest thanks to one and all who helped out with this fundraiser.

Our Standard Six students sat the Language Arts and Science part of their Primary School Exam (PSE).

St. John's Primary welcomed two new teachers on staff, with the departure of Mr. Jesus Cawich and Ms. Cadle.

Congratulations to Tiana Felix who did a swell job of representing St. John's at the spelling bee's district finals.

Who says school is all serious business? We all had some fun with our first Hat Day, Pajama Party and Egg Hunt, and thanks to parents, guardians, and the community for sponsoring the Annual Sport Day, held this year in memory of Ionie Westby.

And don't forget to stop in "Above Ground" coffee shop for a mocha treat and purchase St. John's School calendar. What a great cause!

How else can you help our school? Ah, where to begin?

Your generous contributions will always be put to good use in our school.

We need school supplies as basic as copier ink, Bristol board, typing paper, blackboard paint, educational flash cards, visual air charts, markers and plywood.

We welcome volunteers, especially folks who are interested in offering educational programs and in providing after school activities..

Parents, guardians, and the Placencia community, we thank you for your support!

One of our main goals is getting more students doing homework and projects, and showing respect to their teachers and their fellow classmates.

In May, St. John's School teachers attended a number of workshops to help our students in achieving these goals.

With awareness of our environment, Standard 5 students under supervision of Southern Environmental Association (SEA) will do a sand watch program, and Standard 4, 5, and 6 students and their teachers went to Laughing Bird Caye to do clean up and mark Earth Day.

School and family are a team, and we must continue to strengthen our ties of working together!

Whatever Happened About . . .

Sustainable Tourism Plan: Due to continuing revisions, presentation of the Placencia Tourism Development Plan and Risk Management Plan to Placencia stakeholders has been further delayed until the end of June 2011. The Placencia Tourism Development Plan is part of a National Sustainable Tourism Master Plan, which was presented to the coordinating team of the Ministry of Tourism Civil Aviation and Culture, Belize Tourism Board and Sustainable Tourism Program in May.

The national plan includes comprehensive mapping and physical planning to address new tourism development. The main thrust of the planning is conservation, recognizing the unique natural and cultural environment which differentiates Belize from neighboring Caribbean and Central American destinations.

Peninsula Vision 20/20: Peninsula Vision 2020 consultants, John Flowers and Mark Usher, are now interviewing local individuals and small groups about the way they want to see the Peninsula develop in the next decade, including discussions on issues such as mass versus low impact tourism, crime and mangrove preservation. Flowers and Usher will also be conducting a random survey of area residents and holding larger group meetings to present findings of interviews and the survey. At the end of this process, they will work with the Peninsula Vision 2020 Steering Committee to develop a document that will inform investors, government and social partners about the priorities of people of all parts of the Placencia Peninsula.

Flowers and Usher were hired by Peninsula Vision 2020 with a grant from the World Wildlife Fund as part of its efforts to help local communities deal with climate change and management and conservation of natural resources. The Peninsula Vision 2020 Steering Committee is composed of local organizations including the BTIA, Tour Operators, Tour Guides, Seine Bight and Placencia Village Councils, Southern Environmental Association, Placencia Fishermen Cooperative, Peninsula Citizens for Sustainable Development and members of the Maya Beach community.

Placencia By-Laws: Amended By-Laws are currently being reviewed by Mr. Bala, the Government's lawyer. His review will be followed by another consultation with the Placencia Village Council to review the amendments to make sure everything is accurate. The Council will then submit the By-Laws to the Clerk of the National Assembly to be presented for an official vote. The Village Council was unable to provide a target date by which the By-Laws will be enacted.

Placencia Pier and Promenade Restoration Project: On Wednesday, 27 April 2011 the Placencia Village Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding that sets out the duties and responsibilities of the Village and the national government for the building of Placencia's new pier and restoration of the Placencia Sidewalk. Government will now start the public bid process to select a contractor for the Project.

The Project is expected to start in August or September 2011 and will take about one year to complete. In addition to a new pier and the rebuilding of the existing Placencia Sidewalk, the project also includes public restrooms, signage, lighting and two public meeting spaces. The project is financed by a loan to the Belize Government from the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB).

Placencia Peninsula Sewage System: Feasibility and engineering studies are due to start in early June for a Peninsula-wide sewage system. The sewage system will be funded in part by a grant and loan to the Government of Belize from the IADB.

Crimson Development: According to the Placencia Village Council, the bank account for payments for lots in Crimson Park has been deactivated. Therefore, deposits and payments can no longer be made. The Placencia Village Council understands that the Honorable Gaspar Vega, Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment, will be meeting with the Placencia Village Lots Committee and Area Representative Melvin Hulse to discuss what to do about the project, which was supposed to provide low-cost lots for Belizeans from Placencia Village who are unable to afford property in the Village.

Big Creek Port Expansion: The deepening of the access channel for the Big Creek Port Expansion has been approved after engineers reported that borings in the floor of the existing channel proved that the aquifer for drinking water for Placencia, Seine Bight and Independence/Big Creek would not be disturbed by dredging to deepen the channel.

Only when the last tree has been cut down,

Only when the last river has been poisoned,

Only when the last fish has been caught,

Only then will you find that money cannot be eaten.

Cree Indian Proverb

News from the Placencia Village Council

Trade Licensing: The Placencia Village Council is working along with Mr. Banner of the Ministry of Local Government to enact the Trade License Act for Placencia Village, which will allow the Village to collect trade licenses from all businesses in the Village. Trade licenses will provide the Village Council with sufficient funds to properly run Village affairs, pay outstanding debts and develop community projects.

Culvert System: The Placencia Village Council is now completing a 4 point drainage system that will alleviate flooding from four key locations -- the Arthur Vernon estate moving south to the Leslie estate, then near the Police Station and then the Godfrey and Cabral estates in the New Site Area on the Lagoon side of the main Placencia road.

The primary culvert is an 18' pipe that runs underneath the main road. Run-off pipes leading to the Placencia Lagoon will be 12" in diameter and man holes will be located every forty feet (40') along the run-off pipes for maintenance purposes.

The project will cost approximately BZ\$26,455, with approximately 90% of the cost being paid by the Placencia Water Board. The remaining 10% of the cost of the system will come from the Placencia Village Council and the Ministry of Works, which is donating construction equipment. (The Council would like to give a big thank you to the Placencia Water Board for its investment in our community.)

Road Maintenance: The Ministry of Works has repaired the extremely dilapidated stretch of road in front of Turtle Inn. Many thanks to Mr. Bill Cuevas for seeing this through. Also, many of the potholes and jagged/broken edges on the main road from the airstrip into the Village starting have been repaired.

With respect to the Peninsula Road, the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) is planning to conduct an Exit Workshop to review the Placencia Road Upgrade Project and discuss any related issues, challenges, successes and lessons learned during its implementation. They have requested the Council's assistance in identifying one representative of several groups in our community to also participate in the Exit Workshop. We are now waiting to be informed of the exact date of the Exit Workshop. The Council is also trying to find out when/if the road upgrade will be completed from the Placencia airstrip to the Placencia dock.

Beach Clean Up Program: Currently one Sanitation worker is assigned to clean the beach every day and a second Placencia Village Council employee cleans the field, road and the sidewalk daily and assists with the cleaning of the beach when it is very dirty. With the generous donations from Avadon Divers and Los Porticos, this second employee also cleans the airstrip area once per week. The second employee has been employed by the Council since November 2010 and works from 6 a.m. – 3 p.m. Monday through Saturday and is paid BZ\$40 per day. The Village Council welcomes any business or person who would like to contribute to our Village Clean Up Program.

Sport Field Clean-Up: Since December 2010, the Council has contracted with Mr. William Santos to clean and maintain the sporting field on a monthly basis. The Council has recently decided to charge a fee of \$50 for any game/function to defray the costs of maintenance and electricity. Use of the field for practice sessions remains free.

Sports Field Additional Lighting: The Honorable Melvin Hulse, Stann Creek West Area Representative and Minister of Transport, contributed four additional lights for the soccer field. These additional lights will make for better viewing for night time matches and practice.

Cleaning of Private Property: Property owners who are unable to clean and maintain their own properties may now contract with the Sanitation Board to clean their properties at a cost of \$500 per lot. Also, the 2003 Revised Edition of the Village Council Act authorizes the Placencia Village Council to clean unkempt and overgrown yards within the Village limits. If the Council is forced to clean an unkempt property, the property owner will be charged \$1000 per lot. The Placencia Village Council kindly asks that you keep your properties cleaned.

Potential Health Clinic for Placencia: For some time, Dr. Alexis Caballero, the Placencia Village Council and other community members have been working to find a way to build a new Placencia Village Health Center -- the existing Health Center is too small to adequately meet the needs of the community and cannot be expanded due to its location. (As we all know, several local residents have recently died due to the limitations of the existing Health Center.)

We had hoped that the Ministry of Health (MoH) would fund the new center, but we recently learned that MoH put the project on hold because they did not believe they could provide proper personnel and equipment for the Clinic.

However, on 11 May 2011, Mr Kevin Petzold, the Technical Unit Coordinator of the Social Investment Fund (SIF), confirmed that funding from SIF was possible if remaining funding can be located. In addition, on 14 March 2011, Charles Leslie, Jr., Placencia Village Council Chairman, met with Ken and Elizabeth Allan from the United States who are considering donating US\$50,000 towards a new health center for Placencia through the Placencia Rotary Club.

A tract of public land at the Placencia airstrip is available for a new Health Center, and blue prints for the building have already been drafted.

So, we have the space, the plans, and some money. What we need now is a concerted effort to find the rest of the funding. Anyone willing to help in any way is encouraged to contact Dr. Alexis or the Placencia Village Council.

Tourism Police: PC Middleton is no longer Placencia's Tourism Police officer, and a new Tourism Police officer has not yet been assigned to Placencia. However,

Placencia does have a small building that will be used as the official Tourism Police Office and living quarters, thanks to the generosity of Bob and Sharyn Findell, who donated the building, and A & L Construction, which is helping with the relocation of this building. Also, according to Mrs. Carla Gamboa, a Deputy with the Tourism Police Unit, Mr. Andrew Longworth, the Coordinator for the Tourism Police Unit, is in the process of establishing finances for the completion of the renovation of the donated Placencia Tourism Police Office Building.

Trash Receptacles: As a community service project, The Vikings, Placencia's football club, recently donated twenty trash receptacles to Placencia Village. With the assistance of the Placencia Village Council, these receptacles have been placed along the beach and sidewalk and other key points in the Village. The Council very much appreciates the assistance of The Vikings, and asks that all Village residents give The Vikings their support – and that everyone use the new trash receptacles.

Garbage Truck: The Placencia Water Board and the Placencia Sanitation Company recently purchased another garbage truck at a cost of BZ\$17,606.25, which was raised through fundraisers and a direct contribution from the Placencia Water Board. This new truck should have an immediate impact on alleviating some of the garbage removal issues that have been plaguing the Village.

Street Lighting: A number of street lights need to be repaired and Belize Electricity Limited has assured the Council that repairs will begin soon. New lights have also been requested from Minister Hulse and from the Rural Community Development Office for Stann Creek West. (Mrs. Cordelia Foreman, the Rural Community Development Officer for Stann Creek West, is our contact on this matter.)

Security/Police: The Placencia Village Council is aggressively lobbying the Ministry of Police and Public Safety to appoint a Police Inspector for Placencia Village so that more security resources are available to the Village. The Council is also continuing to work closely with the Police Department on many levels, including financial support. (Thank you to all the generous local businesses and individuals who are helping with the financial support of our Police Department.)

In addition, The People's Coalition has also recently been formed to work with the local Police Department on crime prevention control, traffic management and law enforcement, community needs, general complaints, disciplinary matters, community expectations, policing priorities, crime statistics, reports on prompt and professional response/action of police, commendable actions by police/citizens etc. If you are interested in joining or would like more information, please contact Steve Christensen at, gringo@btl.net

Placencia Lobsterfest: We are in full preparation mode for this year's Lobsterfest, which will be held in Placencia Village on 24-26 June. Volunteers are very much needed, so if you can help, please drop by or call the Village Council office (523-3396) or contact Mrs. Lloydia Caballero at 625-0675. For more information on what is happening this year please visit www.placencialobsterfest.com.

Las Brisas. The Placencia Village Council recently approved the Las Brisas residential subdivision, a development that will be taking place in the near future. The Las Brisas Project encompasses 3.913 acres of land in the inner Placencia Lagoon located just behind Placencia Village. (See map on page 5 for location)

There are several reasons why we decided to support this project: The entire situation was a bit of a paradox, for some in the community believed that we should try and fight to reserve as much of the Lagoon as we can.

Unfortunately the Government of Belize had already issued title to the property to the developer, Mr. John Stothart, and we believe that this made it impossible for us to have stopped this project in any permanent way.

Therefore, we made sure that we had direct input in every aspect of the project, including face to face meetings with the Departments of the Environment, Forestry, Lands, Geology and others.

We believe all GOB Departments and Mr. Stothart were very forthcoming with information and worked with us closely. Our next step is to make sure the project is done properly, in an environmentally friendly way and also the Village will benefit – such as from the donation of fill material for low-lying properties, such as the Hulse Property East of the Police Station.

Letter to the Editor "Thank you for the Mangroves"

A huge, huge thank you to the groups of people and organizations that made this mangrove planting possible for the Peninsula Club, Belize.

I am very proud of the people who came out to help with our dream, especially the children. As adults we owe it to our children to educate them and to help them understand the importance of mangroves. It is nice to see people still pulling together to show the correct way to do mangrove planting and why it is so very important.

This mangrove restoration is very welcomed and I believe it is the only way to save the lagoon. All of Belize is a lagoon. People should be proud to say "lagoon." Let us make the lagoon beautiful and ecologically friendly supported by the work of the people who love this area so much.

DIANNE BULMAN

Picture Oil Derricks on the Seascape in Placencia

The debate about offshore oil development and the related referendum comes down to a choice: tourism or oil. Picture oil derricks as the seascape view from San Pedro, Caye Caulker, Belize City, Hopkins Placencia, Punta Gorda, Turneffe and the Blue Hole!

If the aesthetics don't convince tourists not to come, consider that the average oil platform discharges 90,000 tons of toxic waste during its lifetime – and that's without spills.

Belize's tourism industry and off-shore oil development are simply *incompatible*.

GOB seems to think that we cannot have our cake and eat it too – but we cannot.

BTIA and its members have largely been silent and it is time to take a closer look.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), travel and tourism supports 39,000 jobs in Belize – that is 31% of Belize total employment.

Offshore oil development would add minimal employment opportunities for Belizeans as the average oil rig employs around 200 individuals, and many of these jobs would go to highly skilled foreign oil workers.

It would be wonderful if employment from the two sectors were additive but this simply is not the case. These few oil jobs would come at the expense of many tourism jobs resulting in severe exacerbation of Belize ongoing unemployment crisis.

GOB touts the potential oil tax revenue as a windfall to reduce debt and provide other needs but they neglect to consider the effect on tourism related tax revenue.

The fact is that tourism a very highly taxed industry and tax revenues from oil are, at best, nebulous.

Again, if oil taxes were additive to tourism taxes, it would be worth considering, but increases in oil taxes will be more than offset by a drop in tourism tax taxes if tourists no longer view Belize as a viable eco-tourism destination.

Over the next 10 years, WTTC predicts that the total contribution from travel and tourism in Belize will grow to 39.5% of GDP and the number of jobs contributed will increase to 61,000.

Assuming that tourism growth is managed responsibly, this will result in a sustainable economy and sustainable employment. Oil reserves, on the other hand, are, by definition, finite and if the heart of Belize economy is substituted for this short-term economy, we will be left with no economy.

These are some of the reasons that offshore oil development will not benefit the economy of Belize or the citizens of Belize. It goes without saying that it is contrary to the interests of BTIA and its members. BTB estimates that 70% of Belize's tourists visit Belize's offshore, even though many of these travelers also visit inland resorts. Simply put, without a healthy offshore environment and healthy reef, Belize's entire tourism industry is in jeopardy.

The Coalition to Save our National Heritage now has the required signatures to put this matter to a vote and we all need to get out and vote when the date is set. Although there has been a good deal of media coverage regarding this issue, BTIA and the tourism sector have largely been silent. This matter affects our industry more than any other and it is time to speak up for our investments and the environment upon which they depend.

Sincerely,
Craig Hayes, BTIA Representative
The Coalition to Save our National Heritage

Mr. Anthony Smith “A Versatile Man”

It is a real honor and education for me to sit down and talk to people up and down our Peninsula for each *Roots and Reef* interview.

I have come to think of each person I have interviewed as an individual mosaic, a precious piece among many precious pieces who create our diverse community. Not one has bored me. Just the opposite, I wish the interviews would not end. There is so much inside each and every one who has shared themselves with me.

I also wish I could interview everyone on this Peninsula, for their stories would be rich and telling and undeniably unique, yet all connected, each person working side by side with each other. There is so very much to be learned from every voice in our midst.

Anthony Smith's face is familiar to many of us on the Peninsula. Since 2006, he has been the security supervisor at Placencia's Atlantic Bank. Anthony brings to his job his experience and wisdom developed in his twenty two year career as a Belize Defense Force (BDF) soldier.

Born in Dangriga and raised in Belize City, Anthony was forced to drop out of technical school when his father died in 1978. At the time, Belize was preparing for its Independence, and a major criterion for Independence was the creation of a military force. The British could not be counted on to defend Belize forever, and Guatemala was a serious threat. Belize needed an army.

Anthony answered the call and became a pioneer in the newly formed BDF.

Anthony recalls: “I was proud to be serving and defending my country. I learned much from the classroom studies and loved my training in the jungle and on the Sea. From north to south, east to west, I know this country. I'm a versatile individual.”

The highlight of Anthony's career came on 21 September 1981.

Yes, Belize's Independence Day!

“I was a member of the Mortar Platoon, and my platoon was chosen to participate in the Independence ceremony outside Government House in Belize City (where the Governor General lived, and which is now the House of Culture). It was pouring down rain, but about fifteen minutes to midnight, the rain stopped, and the sky cleared.

“All the lights were turned out. The British soldiers marched off the site, and my platoon marched in. The British flag was lowered, and the Belizean flag was raised.

“At exactly midnight, the lights were turned on, and there we were, Belizean soldiers prepared to defend our



Mr. Anthony Smith

own land, with our own flag waving above us! There was a big gun salute and the huge crowd cheered and yelled! George Price and the Opposition Leader gave speeches, and there was a blessing. I felt great, so proud to be part of such an historic moment! And I am proud to speak about it now!

“Then the rain began again, so we all gathered under a tent where pretty young ladies served lots of food and beverages and we mingled and talked with diplomats from all over the world. I remember meeting a diplomat from Malta who explained to me how fortunate Belize was to have its Independence, because Malta was still not an independent country. The party went on until the early morning hours with music and dancing.

“And I was part of it.”

After Anthony retired from the BDF, he became a ranger at Caye Caulker Marine Reserve, where he assisted in all aspects of research being conducted. He worked with the biologists, and was on the dive team (he is a certified open water diver). He also monitored mangroves, collecting data on both black and red mangroves.

“I learned a great deal from my work as a ranger. It made me so aware that we need more enforcement of mangroves. They are being removed at a terrible rate. I want to be actively involved in creating a mangrove reserve here on Placencia Peninsula.

“I am a big reader of *Roots and Reef*, and read all the newspapers, *Amandala*, the *Reporter*, the *Guardian* and the *Belize Times*. When I go home after work, I read because I want to know what is going on in my country.”

What a wonderful resource the Placencia Peninsula has in Anthony Smith! Cheers, Anthony!

National Land Use Policy

The Government of Belize is working on developing a Land Use Policy and National Integrated Planning Framework to guide land development throughout the entire country.

The Policy and Plan will pinpoint the best use of land in each part of the country and establish zones where certain types of development can and cannot take place.

The need for the Policy has come about because of changes Belize has experienced over the last twenty years, including social, demographic, economic and climate changes, which have, in turn, increased demands on the country's natural resources for agriculture, aquaculture, housing, tourism, business development and conservation.

The draft Policy is almost completed and could be adopted as early as December 2011. However, the Plan and Policy will likely be tested in a few districts or sub-districts first before it is established country-wide.

The program is a joint project among the Government of Belize, the United Nations Development Program, the Global Environmental Facility, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Belize Electric Limited and the Protected Areas Conservation Trust.