

Dear Editor:

It came to public attention that one of our luxurious hotels, the Buccaneer, was identified for having “turning away locals”. If true, it is a practice that must be scrutinized and addressed for the well-being of all who live here in this island community. The article caption on the front page of February 26 Daily News read, “Hotel apologizes after guard shuts out locals”. Have the onus of responsibility been placed on a “guard” for having committed such a grievous act that prompted much talk show radio and social media grumbles?

I seriously doubt that a security guard cited for the ‘turn away’ is granted such clout and independent power. Should the responsibility rest with the manager or owner I would make an educated guess that the guard had to be simply ‘following orders’.

Because I personally feel much sensibility surrounds this controversial topic, we should all(awl ah we)acknowledge that we all wear the banner of responsibility of insuring the safe and well-being of all citizens, residents and visitors alike in this community. Therefore, a forum for dialogue and resolution should be made public via a venue such as town hall meeting as occurs with zoning law changes or made a referendum issue.

Policies as to how access to hotel /restaurant/beach premises are executed should be clear and humane and laws need to be specific and clear. The free beach law-has that been overturned? If the Buccaneer Hotel is registered as a private facility, then it seems as though their judgment to deny or refuse must be upheld, though that freedom should still be measured with a modicum of responsibility. If legally registered to operate as under public law, it seems they should abide by those tenets. Otherwise, they should change their status of operation.

Many of us find it difficult to respect another person’s right to enjoy, the open spaces of ecological beauty, art and creativity, and so unfortunately we must create laws for this good to occur. It seems sensible then that beaches, parks, historic sites and the like are deemed public spaces that should be the domain for ALL to enjoy. They offer a tranquil setting, a place of peaceful rest and mindful reflection amidst the rat race of self-inflicted turmoil lives that we all deserve, when we choose, to escape from time to time. Since most of what is considered ‘choice land’ that served as reservoirs of public enjoyment have been sold to private owners and investors without regard and recognition of public benefit, we must sustain and safeguard those needed public domains-our beaches, parks, historic sites. The sand and sea, the waterways and airspace should not become a commodity with a for sale sign.

How many ‘locals’ do we find frequenting local white-owned businesses that it then becomes necessary to refuse them service and assign designated time frames to patronize? And by ‘locals’ are we referring to blacks-the bawn here types? . How do we distinguish a black local from a black tourist? Many black tourists visit our islands as well. How do we distinguish a white local from a white tourist? And why may any sect be regarded differently; aren’t we all

patronizing for a service or product in exchange for the same dollar that the product or service is tagged?

Oftentimes, friends and I frequent white-owned restaurants, and each time we do, most times we are the only recognizable local. Many locals do not or will not patronize because it is out of the budget, plus we are stuck on our slew of the ‘ultimate’ Caribbean culinary experience—souse and potato salad, peas and rice, stew chicken, stew goat and fish and fungi. We cannot find the flavor or the quantity we seek in a white-owned restaurant for what we think our dollar is worth. What is the ‘serving-the-local’ problem?

Is it a fear of rowdiness, aggression, ill-behavior that I as a server in restaurants have experienced not only from blacks but white clientele as well. And if there is a problem shouldn’t it be handled with respect and appropriate conduct so that a win-win ensues? But to dismiss all locals for the sake of once-in-a-blue-moon unscrupulous behavior amounts to ‘throwing out the baby with the bath water’ syndrome. Williams Delight and Campo Rico communities are labeled the most incorrigible because of the few ‘bad eggs’. Is that considered fair judgment?

I know that if we do not get a handle on these practices and the response we derive from them, we cannot have a peaceful community. One Margarita Hutchinson, a bed and breakfast owner, in a tourist-related publication articulated a dream for our island home. She said, (I dream)”of this beautiful island becoming famous for its ability to sustain its rich agricultural history and ecological health...that people will want to visit from all around the world. I dream that visitors can participate in educational seminars and workshops, where they can learn about how we wisely sustain the health of our environment and support a thriving agricultural industry.

“My dream, she continues” includes a proud island people, (awl ah we)still connected to the land and the sea, as well as a prosperous economy, much of it supported by a special kind of tourist –nature lovers. St. Croix can become the place for low-impact tourism, where endangered sea turtles can continue to nest in peace, because we have the foresight to preserve our precious shoreline. I dream of pristine reefs, teeming with healthy fish and glorious corals that continue to provide world-class diving and snorkeling sites because our citizens know that we cannot afford to allow wastewater and pollutants to run off into the sea. I dream that I will one day awaken to look out the window and see working windmills beside buildings and roofs covered with solar panels that efficiently and economically meet each family and business’ energy needs. I dream that we will support our farmers and fishermen to provide all the food residents and tourists need. This dream can really come true if we create a sound eco-system that sustains itself and inspires every visitor who comes to this island. This dream will come true if government supports farms, fishing piers, and eco-tourism the way it should.”

Jean Holder, the former Secretary General of the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) in the same publication, echoes the sentiments of Hutchinson in a more theoretical context. Holder informs that the “West Indies were largely dependent on ...sugar...up to the beginning of

the nineteenth century...but by the start of the twentieth century there were signs of agricultural diversification. It was not in the best interest of the islands to sustain themselves relying solely on an exclusive monocrop. Strategic and creativity became necessary. Tourism which has become the present day mono-crop in Caribbean island communities must upstage to a more beneficial strategy. Investment in monocrop arrangements in the islands insinuated by Holder, has also exhausted its economic usefulness. Holder announces that there are success stories which reveal through a number of studies that ‘symbiotic relationships’ and ‘inter-sectorial linkages’ strategically planned regionally or nationally must occur.” Holder singles out Barbadian citizen Ena Harvey for her efforts in selling the “message of creating new tourism/agriculture linkages such as horticulture, processed foods, bottled water, herbals and medicinals, craft, farm and agro-based sites and tours, including cultural and scientific sites and attractions; recreational tours, adventure, fishing, hiking, biking, hunting, caving, camping, diving, culinary tourism, health and wellness including visits to herbal gardens, hot springs...”.

This dream can only become reality in collaborative cultivated , nourished friendships and relationships that we build on business, social and professional levels. Former president Jimmy Carter promotes ‘partner’ vs ‘patron’ ideology. To segregate, discriminate, dismiss and marginalize in this community or any is a sure formula for the grumblings of the ‘remember Fountain Valley’ mantra often spread around when this kind of example roar its ugly head. We must strengthen up ourselves and bolster the BIG people that we are in spirit dreaming something bigger and better possible for more than a select few, but imagined for us all, our children, and children’s children. We can make this happen as we ban together regardless of religious, racial, economic , social or political status and belief systems. I say, WE CAN.

Barbara D. Knight
St. Croix
February 28, 2014