



**EMBASSY OF ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES
3216 NEW MEXICO AVENUE, NW
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20016
TEL (202) 364-6730 • FAX (202) 364-6736**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Martha's Vineyard Fire Experts Assist Local Fire Firefighters



Kingstown, April 30, 2013 -A partnership called "The Sister Islands Programme", which twins the island of Martha's Vineyard, United States of America, with St. Vincent and the Grenadines has started to bear fruit.

The Fire Department of the Royal St. Vincent and the Grenadines Police Force (RSVGPF), one of the first beneficiaries of the programme, on Monday, April 29th, 2013, concluded a five-day assessment with fire experts from Martha's Vineyard, a small island in the US state of Massachusetts.

Visiting St. Vincent and the Grenadines were Captains Timothy Carroll and Glenn De Blaise, both residents of Martha's Vineyard, with combined experience in fire-fighting of 55 years. The firefighting experts were also accompanied on the first day of their trip by United States Ambassador to St. Vincent and the Grenadines, His Excellency Larry Palmer, who is based at the US Embassy, Barbados.

The Sister Islands Programme is a response to a request made by St. Vincent and the Grenadines Ambassador to Washington, H.E. La Celia Prince, for the US assistance in boosting the capacity of the local fire department.

Under the guidance of Commissioner of Police, Mr. Keith Miller, Carroll and De Blaise toured several fire units throughout the state, as far as Fancy on the Windward end and the Chateaubelair Police Station as well as Richmond on the Leeward section of the country. The team also visited the Central Fire Unit at the Police Headquarters, E.T. Joshua Airport, Paget Farm Police Station and the J.F. Mitchell Airport on Bequia, in order to conduct an assessment of staff capacity, training levels and overall resource needs to improve the country's fire prevention and defense capabilities. The site assessments also included visits to the Milton Cato Memorial Hospital.

The opportunity was also used to have Captains Carroll and De Blaise examine the draft plans for the Fire Unit at the Argyle International Airport. The visiting experts suggested design changes which will enhance the Unit and ensure that it is the certifiable standard for an international airport. Both visiting and local teams shared best practices, involved in the handling of fire emergencies.

At the opening meeting, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hon. Douglas Slater expressed his satisfaction for the collaboration fostered between the Vincentian Embassy in Washington and the United States Department of State. He thanked US Ambassador Larry Palmer for his government's assistance in addressing the critical needs of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines fire brigade in its drive to develop greater capacity.

Commissioner Miller in his statement said the RSVGPF appreciates the effort of the governments of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the United States as well as the effort of Ambassador Prince for initiating the programme.

"I hope the partnership will continue to develop and its objectives will develop from strength to strength and great benefits will be derived," said Commissioner Miller. "In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, members of the Police Force and in particular the Fire Department will be able to benefit from the opportunity to be trained. We will also have better fire equipment and gears to work with. The State of St. Vincent and the Grenadines will benefit as a result of this venture," said COP Miller as he expressed thanks to Ambassador Prince and Captains Carroll and De Blaise.

Ambassador Prince noted that she approached US Ambassador Palmer ahead of the start of his assignment in Barbados to brief him on some of the most critical needs of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. She said he was very receptive to the idea of working jointly with the SVG Embassy to boost the capability of the Fire Department and that is how the initiative began.

Ambassador Prince spoke of the similarities between St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Martha's Vineyard, including the heavy reliance on tourism and the history of whaling in both islands. She also praised the determination of Mrs. Anita Botti at the State Department, a former Peace Corps volunteer, who worked in SVG in the 1960s, and who was instrumental in assisting Ambassador Prince in forging the bond between both islands.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the visiting experts presented their initial findings in a debriefing session, which will be followed by a written report and plan of action to assist the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in enhancing its fire prevention and response capability.



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