



ers at Cancryn, enjoy using their boat handling skills.

“Driving the big boat, *Straight Ahead*, is a lot of fun,” says Shoquan.

“The dinghy is what I like best,” adds Shamoy.

Included in this is ecology education such as identification of the mangrove’s inhabitants (nesting birds, fish, lobster, land crabs, key deer, etc.) and the importance of maintaining the fragile ecology and the spawning areas.

“It’s fun to snorkel and see all the fish. We’ve seen stuff like sharks, turtles, starfish and barracudas,” says Joseph Wilson, a sixth grader at Lockhart Elementary School.

Damian Williams, also a sixth

grader at Lockhart, enjoys fishing. “I caught a yellow tail snapper. It was like a tug of war, but I got it to the boat.”

Loveland teaches the conservation importance of catch and release.

“Being out on the boat is like a classroom on the ocean for the children,” says Jackie Brown, executive director of the Boys & Girls Club of St. Thomas. “They are seeing and understanding how they can use these skills to create successful careers.”

FUNDING & THE FUTURE

Parents of the MVP students don’t pay a penny for the training of their children. Instead,

the MVP programs are financed through proceeds from the operation of two fishing tournaments, the ABMT and Wet’N Wild Center Console tournament; a weeklong activity for the public called MarlinFest; the profit created by ad sales from *On The Edge* magazine, and private donations.

“There is much to undertake in order to become a full-blown training school. However, what we do know is that even if not all MVP students enter marine/hospitality/tourism careers because of this free training, those who do will be able to earn a good living and our visitors will benefit from their professional training!” says Loveland.

The MVP, Inc., is a 501 (c)(3) organization. For more information about the MVP, visit: www.abmt.vi/Pages/mvp.htm OR call 340-775-9500.



MARINE VOCATIONAL PROGRAM STRAIGHT AHEAD!



Written by Carol M. Bareuther, RD



The difference between a college and university are the number of programs offered in one location. Likewise, the distinction between an idea and the reality of a Marine Vocation Program (MVP) in the U.S. Virgin Islands is providing students with a variety of ways to learn about careers on the sea. That is certainly what happened during 2016, making for another leaps and bounds banner year for the MVP.

“The main purpose of the MVP offerings is to introduce the youth of the U.S. Virgin Islands, primarily 9 to 17-year-olds from the Boys and Girls Club as well as several other youth groups, to the many career opportunities in the territory’s marine/hospitality industry,” explains Jimmy Loveland, MVP founder and director of the USVI Open/Atlantic Blue Marlin Tournament. “We began in 2008 by teaching students to swim and then we included training in watersports activities such as sailing, snorkeling and scuba diving. Last June, we added a boat handling and seamanship class. This now includes learning how to row a boat, drive a dinghy with an outboard motor and navigate a 28-foot diesel powered Cape Dory in the waters of the Mangrove Lagoon and surrounding seas east of St. Thomas.”

IT ALL STARTS WITH SWIMMING

Learning how to swim is the foundation of the MVP program. This may seem basic for young people who grow up on an island surrounded by water. However, many Virgin Islands children lack this life-saving skill.



“Our instructors teach students the basics at first, like feeling comfortable with putting their faces in the water and blowing bubbles. By the end of the course, they can swim and feel comfortable in the water,” says John Vasbinder, executive director and head coach of the St. Thomas Swimming Association.

MVP students must pass an end-of-course swim test in order to move on to the next levels of training activities. This includes learning to snorkel and scuba dive. MVP students ages 12 and older can take beginner scuba classes, which ultimately earn them a basic PADI scuba certification.

LEARN-TO-SAIL

Swim-competent students also move on to an eight-week learn-to-sail program taught at the St. Thomas Yacht Club. Instructors are high school students on the sailing team at the Antilles School, who also have their US Sailing Instructor Certificates. The high schoolers give of their time and talents earn community service credits needed for graduation.

“A lot of the Boys and Girls Club kids were not used to the ocean and were definitely new to sailboats,” says Caroline Teare, a senior and one of the instructors who enjoyed watch-

ing her trainees develop. “It took some coaxing with some of them, specifically the girls, to get them into the water and have them jump off the boats once we moored up. Most of the boys made their excitement obvious, doing backflips into the water. I was really impressed with how quickly and easily the actual sailing and concepts came to them. For example, they were constantly tugging the mainsheet to try and make the boat go faster because they loved when the boat was flying and water splashed through the bottom. It was an amazing experience watching these kids become such naturals and absolute lovers of sailing and all that accompanies it.”

In December, MVP students got the chance to crew for some of the best women sailors in the world at the Carlos Aguilar Match Race, which hosted the finale of the Women’s International Match Racing Series in December. The competition took place in the Charlotte Amalie harbor. Twenty-two MVP students took part in the event-within-an-event Carlos Aguilar Youth Regatta. Students and

their top-ranked skippers, who hailed from France, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and the USA, sailed three round-the-buoy fleet-style races.

“I liked how they taught us to act on the yachts, like when I got to drive. Oh, and winning a race. I liked that too,” says 11-year-old Shamoï Shaw, who sailed with the USA’s Nicole Breault.

MVP’s 8-year-old De’Jahnie Huggins crewed for Sweden’s Caroline Sylvan. “What I liked best was tacking and jibing. It was fun.”

BOAT HANDLING 101

The first seamanship class kicked off in June with 8 MVP students. This was made possible thanks to owner donations. The first is a 1987-built 28-foot Cape Dory donated in March by local retired banker Joe Hosie. Loveland and a team of volunteers spent a several months restoring the single-engined diesel powered craft into the perfect training vessel, called *Straight Ahead*. Other donations have been two inflatable, rigid bottom dingies, a row boat as well as a the most re-

cent gift of a fiberglass paddle board from Budget Marine. In September, the boat handling classes expanded to nearly 20 students with Saturday morning and afternoon classes.

We now have local youngsters that can swim, snorkel and sail, plus tie a bowline, prepare a vessel for departure (checking oil, fuel, water) and know what line position they are to handle.

“We now have local youngsters that can swim, snorkel and sail, plus tie a bowline, prepare a vessel for departure (checking oil, fuel, water) and know what line position they are to handle. They can also be drilled successfully on the names of the boat parts (port, starboard, bow, stern, gunnels, transom, etc.) and can steer, engage the transmission gears and control the engine throttle. They can tell the direction of the wind by the clouds and by the feel on their body and by compass they can call out travel direction. We emphasis the importance of boat crew and passenger safety. Certainly, the biggest growth can be seen when we pick up a mooring - their fear of jumping into the water is all gone!” Loveland explains.

“What I enjoy most is driving the dinghy because its fast,” says Albert Hodge, a 7th grader at the Addelita Cancryn Junior High School.

Shoquan Christopher, and brother Shamoï, also 7th grad-



Photo by Dean Barnes