

US students explore Carib Territory

By Rena Auguste

A contingent of 21 American students is spending the summer vacation in the Carib Territory this year, exploring Dominica and engaging in various voluntary community service activities as part of the annual VISIONS Dominica youth programme.

Director of VISIONS


Dominica 2008, Adam Schersten said, "We all cook and clean together; we all sleep in big rooms together. They learn a lot about social interaction. We build communication skills through an activity we call "circle" which we do during the week . . . we split up into three worksite teams each day and go to different places to work.

"Not every kid is expe-

riencing the same thing. We work for 5 to 6 hours a day." Schersten explained. He said after working these long hours, the kids spend time in the afternoons doing recreational activities --- such as learning how to make juice, cassava bread, baskets and local jewelry --- or they simply explore Dominica's pristine natural attractions.

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Participants of the VISIONS Summer Programme 2008. 

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During their sojourn, the group has built four picnic tables, three of which will go to the Atkinson primary school, and a 19'x12' shelter on the Atkinson school compound where students can sit and have their snacks. The group also helped to re-thatch a hut at the Tuna Village in Concord and paint the exterior of the Crayfish River Pre-school and school for disabled children.

In addition, the group has built 21 chairs to fit tables that were built for disabled children by VISIONS last year. In collaboration with the Atkinson Young Achievers Group, they have repainted the Atkinson and Antrizle bus stops, cleaned the Antrizle beach road and made a partition in a section of the Atkinson Community centre to house a computer lab.

Schersten said the VISIONS 2008 visit to Dominica has been phenomenal and the people were extremely friendly to them especially in the Carib Territory. "Immediately upon arrival we were welcomed by people. They would come by and say hello and tell us who they had been friends with in the years past."

He said the group has been enjoying the landscape and foliage of the island and is stunned by the lush tropical forest. The group has visited the Spany Falls, Emerald Pool, Titougeorge, Champaign springs, a number of beaches, rivers and other sites.

Schersten said the money for participants' food and transportation comes from the tuition fees they paid to participate in the summer programme.

He said the programme gets new participants every year and many return to VISIONS. The programme encourages repeaters to visit different programme sites.

Schersten said Dominica has quickly worked its way into his heart and will be a part of his life as he grows older. This year is his first year as director of the programme here and he is hoping to be back next year.

Participants in this year's VISIONS programme shared their impressions of Dominica with The Chronicle.

Kimia said "The Island is beautiful so that part of my stay is amazing. The people here are so very kind. Back at home if you wave at people down the street they probably wouldn't wave back. Here you wave at people especially in the Carib Territory . . . and they wave right back. They smile and it's really nice."

Liam commented, "I like this place a lot. It is really a beautiful place. What I like most is the hospitality."

Another participant Febianna said, "My experience here has been really awesome. My favorite part is helping the community that we were staying in and the communities around us. We made some differences in Atkinson, Antrizle, Crayfish River and they are going to enjoy it for at least a year. It was fun," she said.

Shanny declared, "We've been to lots of places. I really like the hiking and the pools. Everything is so natural here and so beautiful. Back home I'd never seen anything like that. I went to Titougeorge twice and it

had to be one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen in my life. I think the people that live here don't realise how lucky they are, being here it's like in paradise."

The VISIONS 2008 group comprises 21 participants, three staff members from the USA, Scott Thatcher, Elizabeth Hage and Adam Schersten, as well as two local staff members, Anthony Dupigny and Suzan Sanford.

The participants arrived on July 14 and depart on August 10, followed by the US staff on August 13. This year is the 12th year VISIONS has visited Dominica.

VISIONS is a service-oriented, cross-cultural programme for youths 14 to 18 years of age. They travel to different countries, get immersed in the culture, learn the different ways of life and repay their hosts by working on community development projects.

The organisation started as an offshoot from an American-based summer programme on a farm in Pennsylvania. Over the years, VISIONS spread throughout Central and South America and the Caribbean.