After 7 Weeks: Conclusion of Carnival 50

By Sarina Alexander

The time between March 16th to May 7th provided more than seven weeks of carnival celebration for the population of Sint Maarten and the many visitors that came to partake and share this cultural experience. Like most events of that scale; St Maarten's golden years of Carnival stirred mixed emotions and a few controversies.

Let's begin with the controversy. Facebook has become a platform for expressing one's thoughts, opinions and experiences and one of the subjects that raised some brows was simply to know whether we were celebrating 50 years of carnival or the 50th anniversary?

With a little math, English comprehension and help from some Facebook users it is concluded that 1966 was considered a commemorative year and in 1970 the tradition began, with the formation of the committee board. Therefore, 1969-2019 represents 50 years of celebrating carnival and 2020, being the 51st annual celebration, will be the 50th anniversary (= date on which an event took place a previous year).

The next issue, if not the ultimate, was regarding the costumes. Oh the hassle! Oh the calamity! Oh the despair when the day of the Grand Carnival Parade has arrived but not your costume that you paid so much for and perhaps even a plane ticket!

Though this can happen anywhere, many agree that producing locally would be a key factor in ensuring that deadlines are met.

Patti Meotti: Italian Artist on St. Maarten

By Chris Morvan

Our island is her home for many years, and now, Patti Meotti's art is available in galleries.

Amuseum Naturalis Continues to Grow

Free to enter, this museum showcasing local culture and nature is getting better every month and has become a 'must visit'.

Full Article on Page 6

Full Article on Page 4

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Letter From the Editor  
May 2nd, 2019

In this post-Carnival issue, we welcome back our senior writer Chris Morvan with several articles. While the island was immersed in carnival festivities, Chris had bailed out and went with his wife on a Caribbean cruise. Of all places, one of the ports of call was Sint Maarten and Chris made it his mission to report his cruise in a way that we landlubbers understand what the typical cruise ship passenger is experiencing when coming to SXM. We will publish his experiences in two parts. Look out next week for Part One of Chris Morvan's experiences on the high seas.

Sarina Alexander enjoyed this year’s Carnival to the fullest. But she also took her time to talk to some critical voices, who pointed out some serious shortcomings. If expensive and prepaid costumes can't be delivered in a timely fashion, this is sabotaging the core of the celebrations.

Diving instructor Leslie Hickerson reports on a new disease striking the local corals and lists the official recommendations of how to help this essential natural resource to regain health.

Jan Thoelke
Publisher

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ST-MAARTEN.COM Weekly Edition is a publication of DigiPost Media:

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149 Rue Lady Fish
97150 St-Martin
Email: info@st-maarten.com

Publisher: Jan Thoelke
Email: j.thoelke@st-maarten.com

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Top Taps
Amuseum Naturalis is a free museum located at The Old House in French Quarter. It has been open less than a year, but has already attracted over 5,000 visitors. Over 2,000 students have visited the Amuseum with school classes or youth groups. The Amuseum is created and operated entirely by volunteers. Any visitor to our island with interests in Caribbean culture and nature should pay this museum a visit. If you plan to go to Orient Beach, you'll find Amuseum Naturalis on the main road coming from French Quarter.

In the last few months, Amuseum Naturalis has added over 60 educational signs and panels. The new signs tell a wide variety of stories about the island’s nature and heritage. The signage was created and installed by the Les Fruits de Mer association, with funding from France’s Fonds pour le Développement de la Vie Associative.

“Amuseum Naturalis has been telling St. Martin’s most fascinating nature stories since we started,” explained co-founder Mark Yokoyama. “By tripling the number of displays, we’re able to dig deeper into nature and explore many other areas. You can learn about the animals that live only on St. Martin, but also about the roots of traditional agriculture and how St. Martiners designed their buildings to beat the tropical heat. We’re thrilled to showcase more facets of local heritage,” said Les Fruits de Mer President Jenn Yerkes. “Many kids who come to the Amuseum don’t know about the African roots of Caribbean bush medicine, the history behind St. Martin’s stone walls or why the flamboyant tree is so important on the island. The additional exhibits and our great volunteers help local youth connect with their heritage.”

With the latest signage in place, the Amuseum is already looking towards the future. The association is currently developing signage to highlight the lives and works of St. Martiners with their Citizens of Change project, funded by the Be the Change Foundation. They also welcome topic suggestions from the community and are eager to work with local experts to develop displays on new topics.

People interested in volunteering opportunities at the Amuseum can contact info@lesfruitsdemer.com. Amuseum Naturalis is open from 9am to noon Tuesday to Saturday, and admission is free. It is located at The Old House, on the hill above Galion Beach in French Quarter. More information is available at http://amuseumnaturalis.com.
Conclusion of Carnival 50
Sarina Alexander talks to participants

Continued from Page 1

This could also be a way to fully create and express the essence of the creativity and culture of St. Maarten without so many exterior influences, particularly from Trinidad. Speaking of exterior influences. My interviewee who wishes to remain anonymous, shared her issues. In her opinion, the major factor that differentiates Sint Maarten from other Caribbean islands is our mixing. We are a cosmopolitan territory composed of people from the four corners of the globe but with the increase in visitors, each bringing along their own representative flags, carnival 50 didn’t necessarily feel like an emphasis on the importance of our culture and the opportunity to create a common identity and a synergy around it but rather another annual celebration. Finally, her pet peeve was regarding the play backs. “I did not pay so much money to listen to a play back!”

When at a concert, the whole fun and experience is in being able to hear your favorite performer perform live and direct with a live band and not lip syncing. Personally, though there may have been a few slip ups, I truly enjoyed this golden year celebration and I felt a maturity and progress in the product that was offered to the public this year. I strongly vouch for the acquisition of a Pass. Though the price may seem a bit costly at first, getting a carnival Pass grants you access to all of the events and a private designated incoming queue, saving you both money and time. The quality of the shows were truly impressive. Lighting, stage, artistic performances, invited guests, fireworks... the energy that was given at every concert, every parade, every event was contagious and wildly spread through a village that was hardly ever empty.

St Maarten carnival is rather young if comparing to elders such as Trinidad with 2 centuries of experience and savoir-faire behind it. The SCDF and private promoters are to be commended in their efforts and achievements.

King Momo, burnt to ashes marks the closing of Carnival 2019 until next year from April 16th to May 3rd, 2020.

Happy, because her costume arrived in time

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An Italian Artist Who Loves Sint Maarten
Chris Morvan meets Patti Meotti

There is a sort of lively good humor about much of the work of Patti Meotti that reflects the character of the woman herself. But hers is a story of a life changed by trauma and which could have ended years ago in tragedy.

Born in Milan, Italy, Meotti has lived in St. Maarten for more than 20 years. An artist from as early an age as she can recall, she studied art and became a hyper-realistic illustrator; her gift was for detail and she could reproduce a photograph with, well, photographic accuracy.

Her career in that field was already well established when she was involved in a car crash that almost killed her and she came desperately close to losing her right arm. Being right-handed and a talented pianist as well as a painter, to lose the arm would have been catastrophic.

However, art is not just a career but a passion to this woman, and she reinvented herself as a purveyor of various styles including the trademark people in hats and abstract work.

“I love painting,” she says. “It relaxes me and gets rid of all the negative energy. Sometimes I use my hands, sometimes a knife and sometimes a brush. It all depends how I feel.”

She also loves this island, despite having had a lovely home in the Pelican area destroyed by Irma. Patty Meotti’s work is available through The Art Box Gallery in Simpson Bay and a new name: Awag Art Gallery, soon to open in Cole Bay. In addition, you will find the lady herself with some of her work from five till nine in the evening in front of Le Soleil Boutique in Porto Cupecoy. That’s the first Friday of every month.

The surgeon duly did his utmost to patch Meotti up, and the bones in that limb are now supplemented and held together by metal. The hand, outwardly unremarkable, functions, but some of the sensitivity was lost, and with it the ability to work with the incredible precision that had been her forte.

She uses Facebook as a marketing tool: www.facebook.com/groups/MeottiArtGallery, and is also more than happy to receive clients at her home/studio in Cole Bay. She can be contacted through the Facebook page or by email, meottigallery@gmail.com.
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If we are using compound words in the answer, they do NOT have spaces!

If you try to solve the puzzle as a visitor to our island and you get stuck: don't be shy! Approach a local and ask. You might find they struggle to answer as well. Or strike up an interesting conversation and learn a bit about our very unique region.

Mistakes do happen, even though our puzzle is produced right here on the island. If you detect an error, drop us a line at SXM@EMAIL.COM.

Puzzle Solution on page 18
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Small Is Beautiful If You Like Beer
Pelikaan is St. Maarten’s own craft brewery

Continued from Page 1

By Chris Morvan

The world may appear to be drowning in a sea of bland, mass-produced beer, but fear not: St Maarten has its own antidote to that.

It comes in the form of Pelikaan Brewery, a small operation based in Cole Bay. Pelikaan is a micro brewery – also known as a craft brewery – run by a Frenchman, Stephen Winkel, and an Argentinian, Nicolas Carlini. They started making beer four years ago in the kitchen of Nicolas’ house in the Pelican area, hence the name of the beer, before moving to more suitable premises next to Island Water World.

You don’t have to be a drinker to like the smell of a brewery, and the aroma that emanates from this little workplace is almost enough to convince you that this stuff is good for you. And it is a small place, which was something Stephen had to emphasize when he went to the authorities to get the necessary permissions.

The people who issue the licenses were thinking large-scale, and Stephen had to explain the concept of the craft brewery and why, in his world, small is beautiful.

The partners had no experience of brewing before they started, so why choose to do it?

“Because I like good beer and there was nothing,” Stephen says. He’s an engaging, lively character who is clearly enjoying what he and Nicolas do for a living.

Mullet Bay is a blond beer, Soualiga contains mango (“For acidity, not fruit – we don’t do any disgusting sweet beers”), while Irma is an IPA, bitter and strong. Mont Careta is a porter, named after the second highest point in the island, and the ingredients in this case, as actually listed on the label, are water, malt, hops, toasted coconut and yeast. The best-before date, batch number and alcohol content are hand-marked in ballpoint pen on the label.

The biggest sellers are Mullet Bay and Irma, and the boys are currently brewing like crazy to keep pace with demand, with the peak months having seen stock flying off the shelves. Production is currently 7,500 litres a month, but that is set to increase soon. The hops that are so important to the flavors come from a small farm in the US and the malt comes from France.

“And to reduce our carbon emissions we have a plan to bring the malt here on a three-masted sailing ship,” Stephen says.

The aim is to fill the ship with their beer when it leaves St Maarten, creating an economic cycle such as traders have been doing since the first caveman piled his handmade clubs into a hollowed-out log and set off in search of customers.

It’s the sort of apparently crazy scheme which Stephen and Nicolas enjoy and which, they say, the small size of the business makes possible.

Pelikaan beers are available at Carrefour and Monoprix, as well as various bars including Lagoonies. That’s significant because this Frenchman was lured to the island by the woman who is now his wife, namely Olivia, the proprietor of Lagoonies.

So lovers of lovingly-made beer know who to thank.
Hidden Gems of Orange Grove
Chris Morvan meets wine merchant/restaurateur Sylvain Pereira

Continued from Page 1

Orange Grove is not the most glamorous location in the island. Nor is it very well known. It's on the corner of Union Road and Orange Grove Road, which comes up from Cole Bay. If you're coming from the direction of Philipsburg, over the mountain and down to the roundabout, take the exit that leads to the French side and it's just along there, around the corner and on the left.

So far, so obscure. But what looks like a parking lot with shops on two sides contains two hidden gems: Select Wine Cellar and a lunchtime haunt, the French bistro-style Champagne Restaurant, both presided over by Sylvain Pereira.

I meet him at the wine shop, which is a far cry from the average tidy, clinical retail outlet. The walls are lined with bottles of wine, but there is a little station halfway along, with open bottles and clusters of small glasses. Beyond that, another room contains a long wooden table decked out with large, serious wine glasses, like a connoisseur's country kitchen, where he might entertain his friends, putting the world to rights while savoring some fine vintages.

And that is pretty much what happens here from time to time. You can't just walk in and get a few free samples, but if you happen to be a friend or a good customer, you may from time to time be invited to such a gathering.

We need a bottle of wine for the photo, and Sylvain's automatic choice is significant: Chambolle-Musigny, a red Burgundy which doesn't need to be described as 'good' because you get the feeling every bottle in here is excellent.

Sylvain is a Frenchman from the Burgundy region - hence the bottle for the picture - who studied the catering trade before becoming a sommelier: a kind of upscale wine waiter who really knows the subject and can help customers who don't really know their way around a wine list, as well as advising the more knowledgeable about the particular characteristics of any given bottle.

Having visited this island briefly, he decided to move here and ran the Vinissimo wine shop in Marigot for four years, also working as a sommelier at Le Moulin Fou at Maho, before starting his own business. Select Wine Cellar has been in this Orange Grove location for 15 years now.
continued: Sylvain Pereira - French Wine Merchant

Starting from scratch and building a customer base presents a challenge for any business - and Sylvain is not a great one for throwing money at advertising. "I knew some people from my time in Marigot," he says. "And little by little you grow some regular customers." A similar concern is finding the stock, and Sylvain relies to a large extent on small producers.

"In some cases you have to reserve the stock every year to make sure you get it," he explains, pointing out that even with famous wines - let's say Sancerre, Châteauaufrè du Pape or Chablis - the body of wine going by that name is produced by individual operations of various sizes. His connections made while learning his trade in France make it possible for him to find the right producers and make deals with them.

It is worth noting, though, that those three randomly-chosen names are not the names of grape varieties. France is different from most wine-producing countries in several respects, including the concept of ‘terroir’, which encompasses everything from soil to climate that contributes to the character of a wine. Simply calling something Merlot or Cabernet Sauvignon is not enough for traditional French winemakers because it doesn't tell the full story.

You are also less likely to find French wine in screwcap bottles, because the cork is still the favored method of sealing. While some may fear that leads to the occasional tainted bottle known as 'corked', Sylvain points out that superior types of cork are used now, vastly reducing what used to be a slight but significant problem.

French wines account for about 90% of Select Wine Cellar's stock, with some Spanish, Italian and Portuguese too. What you will not find here is a quick bottle of Chilean Cab Sauv for under $10 - it's just not that sort of place.

"I specialize in French wine because it's what I know," Sylvain says. "And when people ask me why I don't have South American wines and so on, my answer is that I can't do everything. You have to limit yourself."

His customers are a mix of restaurants, local residents and visitors. Sometimes they know what they want and sometimes they're open to ideas.

"I get to know their tastes," Sylvain says, "And if I have something they haven't tried before, they trust me."

How to Plan Your Jewelry Shopping to Get the Best Deal

Many repeat visitors to St. Maarten wait to make their jewelry purchases until they are back on the island and can visit their favorite jeweler on Philipsburg's Front Street.

Before you plan to shop, check the cruise ship schedule; you don't want to hit town while five ships offload 15,000 passengers, turning quant Philipsburg into a hectic, overheated shopping mall. There are days when there are no ships docked, and you have the stores basically to yourself. You will find the salespeople to be more relaxed, might even offer you a beverage and there will be fewer attempts for a hard sell.

Some of the major stores advertise heavily with the cruise lines. This kind of marketing is highly efficient for them, but also incredibly expensive. As a customer, you pay this expense, even if you are not a cruise ship passenger. This is why you should prefer to shop in stores which focus more on the hotel or vacation villa guests in their marketing efforts. Jewelers carrying authentic international brands have to work with a slimmer the profit margin, and you won't find a lot of room for bargaining. Other stores feature non-branded designs, offered for a fraction of what the fashionable originals cost, and there is also more room for you, the customer, to negotiate.

The Maho Village shopping district offers an attractive alternative to visiting the island's capital. The pace at Maho is relaxed, and the shops stay open until 9.30 PM, giving you a chance for shopping even after dinner. And remarkably, the prices are not higher than in Philipsburg.

Norman Motwani, owner of Jewels & Linen points out that the overhead in Maho Village is much lower for the stores and these savings can be passed on to the client. "Our clients stay in hotels or vacation homes. We know that they will compare offers. This is why we don't believe in giving any pressure to purchase anything. We know that they will come back to us."

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Easy

| 7 | 2 |
| 9 | 1 |
| 5 | 3 |
| 4 | 7 |
| 8 | 6 |
| 9 | 5 |
| 2 | 1 |
| 4 | 3 |

Medium

| 7 | 1 |
| 8 | 5 |
| 5 | 3 |
| 9 | 2 |
| 7 | 1 |
| 4 | 9 |
| 8 | 4 |
| 2 | 9 |

Difficult

| 6 | 7 |
| 2 | 3 |
| 4 | 9 |
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| 8 | 1 |
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How to Tip For Great Service
Or how different tipping cultures clash on SXM

Tipping is a particular challenge on our multi-cultural island. The Dutch side restaurants follow the American style system, where the service charge is not automatically included in the price of a meal, and the staff very much depends on tips. The French side follows European law, where waiters are making a living wage independent of tip. But this is where rules get a bit murky. Some scrupulous restaurant owners keep tips for themselves and pay their staff only a pittance of a salary. We hope that this article will help you to understand better how the service charge is handled locally and to protect the hard-working members of the hospitality industry from greedy exploitation, which is unfortunately all too common.

Tipping in Dutch Side Restaurants

Restaurants on St. Maarten's Dutch side follow the American concept for paying servers: meager base salary, service charge not included in prices on their menus, and the expectation that the guest is adding at least 10-20% tip to the bill. There are a few establishments on St. Maarten which try to confuse the issue. They use standard US point of sale paper forms for their dining bill, which includes a line for ‘tax’. In many cases, a 15% charge is added to this line and the word ‘tax’ is not changed or removed. This is a service charge and NOT a tax, as there is no such tax on the island! To make matters worse, service staff is NOT getting this fee in many restaurants.

If you notice that something might be amiss, don't be shy. Ask your server if they are getting their tips paid out. In some restaurants, they are instructed not to give an honest answer. If you feel this to be the case, ask for the manager to get to the bottom of the issue. Again, there is nothing wrong to politely ask about the house policy.

Many restaurants that accept credit cards have the line to fill in the tip after they have charged your credit card but cannot add a tip after the fact. So, if using your credit card, always ask if you can add the tip after or if you need to give them the amount ahead of time. Or, it's always safe to leave a cash tip!

Tipping in French Side Restaurants

Even though European laws state that the service charge has to be INCLUDED in the price of a meal, most restaurant owners on French St-Martin are relying on the American way of handling this issue. Legally, the price posted on the menu includes service, and there is no obligation to pay more.

Most Europeans just round up and leave a few Euros, pretty much what an American guest would pay on top of the customary 15% in the US, to show extra satisfaction.

The truth is: staff of the restaurants on the French side expect American visitors to tip well (or over-tip) and don't expect too much from their European countrymen. You will keep everyone happy with an amount around 10%.

Visitors coming from Europe should consider being a bit more generous than they would be in their home countries. Especially Dutch and French guests don't realize that local wages are low and the cost of living is high. The weekly hours the wait staff in SXM has to put in just to pay for the basics of life would shock any European. Anyone interested in a 70 hour work week without paid vacation time?

Remember: Do not feel uncomfortable asking about the house policy regarding tipping.
Crossword Puzzle Solution

Sudoku Solutions:

Easy

Medium

Difficult

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FOR RESERVATIONS OR TAKE OUT CALL 1 (721) 544-2323
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Welfare Road - Simpson Bay - Right next to Pineapple Pete
What Is Happening to Our Coral Reefs?

By Leslie Hickerson

You may have seen updates from the St. Maarten Nature Foundation about a new disease spreading through the coral colonies around Sint Maarten/Saint Martin. What is this disease? How did it get here? What can we do to stop it?

‘Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease’ was first documented in 2014 in the Florida Keys and has since traveled through the Atlantic Basin with similar outbreaks now being reported in Mexico, Jamaica, and the US Virgin Islands.

Research started on St. Maarten in October of 2018 that established the disease had affected several areas both in and outside of the protected Man of War Shoal Marine Park. The most common types of corals that are affected are hard (stony) colonies including brain and pillar corals.

“The disease is a relatively new issue that has been plaguing coral reefs in the Atlantic Basin. The coral reef disease manifests itself through the creation of white blotches on stony coral, eventually leading to the loss of tissue and death in the coral colony. The disease affects 20 different species of coral and is able to kill colonies within several weeks or months. Unfortunately the spread and lethality of the disease is being facilitated by poor water quality at several locations surrounding the island,” explains SXM Nature Foundation Project Manager Melanie Meijer zu Schlochtert.

Tissue Loss Disease has traveled south from the Florida Keys and has caused unparalleled damage to the colonies it comes in contact with. The mortality rate of the hard corals that are affected can range from 66-100%. This means that after being exposed to the disease the whole colony will most likely die within the next few months.

Stony Tissue Coral Loss can easily be mistaken for coral bleaching as the early symptoms of the disease include small white patches appearing on the colony, which are actually the exposed skeleton of the coral. In coral bleaching, which is caused by rising water temperatures, the coral has expelled the algae that normally live on it causing parts of it to turn white.

These pieces are still alive and can recover from bleaching, but are more susceptible to disease and damage.

Research conducted by the National Marine Sanctuaries of NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) point to water flow and touch as the most likely causes of Tissue Loss spreading throughout the ocean. This means that divers who come in close contact with the reef may be a huge component in the spread of this disease. In an effort to lessen its affects in our area and keep it from traveling to our neighboring islands the St. Maarten Nature Foundation has issued the following warning to divers:

1. In order to protect our coral reefs and prevent the spread of the disease a 100% NO TOUCH policy is in effect on all St Maarten dive sites. Scuba divers touching St Maarten coral reefs could risk a fine.

2. All scuba diving gear leaving our island (or being used on another island) should be soaked in a 5% chlorine bleach solution, be rinsed in a lot of fresh water and dried in the sun. This is mandatory, Dive Schools will need to forward this message to their customers, and we recommend visiting divers to use the gear of our dive schools.

3. Please do not use any single-use plastic item or board of the boat or close to the ocean.

Even non-divers can play a huge part in protecting the coral by avoiding single-use plastic, and disposing of it properly when it cannot be avoided. A huge amount of our waste ends up in the ocean due to an overworked waste management system.

There are several negative affects of plastic entering the ocean including life-threatening harm caused to marine life and an increased risk of disease in corals. Research shows that corals that are polluted with plastic are 85% more likely to contract diseases that could be fatal.
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