

MARINE-MANNED AID ORGANIZATIONS READY FOR 2018 HURRICANE SEASON

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER



PHOTO: ALASTAIR ABREHART

Chris Haycraft (mic) with Scott Meyers and his daughter Isla, Don Makowiecki (cap) and BVI Premier Hon. Dr. Orlando Smith. Scott and Don were on stage at the end of the Spring Regatta award ceremony in acknowledgement of the contributions made by the BVI Immediate Relief Fund and Sailors for Hope after hurricane Irma.

The number of hurricane relief organizations that sprang up and helped hard-hit Caribbean islands in the wake of last year's storms was heartwarming. One of these, Sailors for Hope, drew extensively on the love of sailors globally for this region to create a network of assistance. What is noteworthy is that nearly a year later, many organizations such as Sailors for Hope are still in operation. These operations have continually changed focus to adapt to the needs of those they serve, from supplying generators and making roof repairs in the immediate aftermath of the storms, to helping with normal everyday needs today.

Most of all, with the 2018 Atlantic Hurricane Season starting on June 1st, it's heartening to know these organizations are ready to help should disaster strike again.

"Sailing, by its very nature, requires the best of you," says Don Makowiecki, an East Patchogue, New York, USA-based US Sailing International Judge, Senior Judge and Umpire, who has officiated at many Caribbean regattas and who founded Sailors for Hope last fall. "Sailors must learn to be creative, take risks and keep a steady helm. What I'm saying here is that sailors have goals, to win a race, to get to the next port

etc. Once that goal is defined it usually is achieved. In this case, we all worked in our own way to achieve our goals, one of which was to get relief aid to the British Virgin Islands right after the storm."


Right from the start, Makowiecki's team of on-island and stateside sailors brought their collective talents to the table. These included the BVI's Judy Petz and Puerto Rico's Diana Emmanuelli on communications, the BVI's Chris Haycraft as a port agent and principal in two shipping companies, the USA's sailing journalist and website writer, Michelle Slade, the USA's Luiz Kahl of Yachtscoring.com to source supplies, the UK's sailing photographer Ingrid Aberly, and the BVI's Aristocat charter owners, Scott and Brittany Meyers on fundraising.

The scope of support quickly branched out as Makowiecki's Caribbean sailing friends recommended local help organizations that could benefit. Many of these groups had, and continue to have, limited resources and presence for raising funds even before the hurricanes. One of these is the BVI's Family Support Network, which aids those involved in domestic violence. Sailors for Hope donated generators for many single parent households and financially made it possible to feed 3,000-plus family members through the Christmas and New Year's holidays.

"Hopefully, our page on the Sailors for Hope website will give us a broader audience and likely more donations," says board president Judith Charles.

Adopt a Roof and Youth Sailing in the BVI, Project Promise in St. Croix, USVI, and the K1 Britannia Foundation in St. Maarten, are other organizations for which Sailors for Hope currently raises awareness and funds.

Looking ahead, Slade says, "I think organizations like Sailors for Hope, which have deep seated personal connections throughout the Caribbean, is the most efficient way to reach those in need following a disaster. Sometimes working directly with local people on the ground who really understand exactly who needs what and when is more efficient than the big NGO efforts, although clearly there is a place of those organizations also."

For more information, visit: www.sailorsforhope.com 

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