



Contact: Laurel Kaufmann
Phone: 912-571-1956
E-mail: kaufmann.laurel@gmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Blue Flag USVI Coordinators Honored with Environmental Quality Award

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has awarded Blue Flag coordinator and project manager Valerie Peters, the USVI Hotel and Tourism Association and the Virgin Islands Conservation Society an Environmental Quality Award for their role in organizing and executing the USVI Blue Flag program. Award recipients will travel to Puerto Rico in May to attend an award ceremony. Cape Air/Nantucket Airlines will provide three complementary roundtrip tickets for Blue Flag USVI representatives to attend the ceremony.

"We are elated that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has chosen to honor Valerie Peters, the USVI Hotel and Tourism Association, and VICS for their involvement and support of the Blue Flag program," said USVIHTA Environmental Committee Chairman Adrian Davis.

"This will give our program much needed recognition in the stateside markets," added USVIHTA president Lisa Hamilton.

The Blue Flag eco-label initiative is a voluntary quality program for beaches and marinas run by the Foundation for Environmental Education. Recognized in 49 countries, the program operates within the context of improving the environmental quality of beaches and marinas and the management of coastal areas in a holistic way. It is a system that does not curtail recreation and tourism in the coastal area, but rather deals with it through a wide range of subjects, activities and users that have direct and indirect interactions with the coastal environment.

To attain Blue Flag status, beaches and marinas have to comply with over 30 strict criteria concerning environmental information and education, environmental management, safety and service facilities, and water quality. The Blue Flag program must be managed by an environmental organization that is an associate member of FEE. VICS fills that role in the Virgin Islands, and Valerie Peters is the USVI Blue Flag project manager under VICS.

VICS administers the Blue Flag program through a Memorandum of Understanding with USVIHTA. Activities are the responsibility of Valerie Peters and VICS's Blue Flag coordinator, and include: communicating effectively with local participants; ensuring a thorough candidate selection procedure; disseminating public information about Blue Flag and other environmental issues; ensuring that the Blue Flag program has an image of quality and environmental action that is respected and recognized; safeguarding and protecting the Blue Flag brand; and being the principle link between the national and international Blue Flag programs as well as the coordinators.



Peters, who has been praised by her colleagues for her integral role in bringing the program to the territory, said she became involved after recognizing the importance of preserving the Virgin Islands' natural resources to ensure an economically viable future for the islands. This resulted in numerous years of volunteer work in various environmental conservation efforts including the introduction and implementation of Blue Flag USVI.

Peters spent 2006 to 2009 networking and introducing the Blue Flag concept to various stakeholders in the private and public sector. In 2009, USVIHTA took on the challenge and supported a feasibility study to determine if the proper infrastructure was in place in the Virgin Islands to back such a rigorous project. In 2010, the pilot phase began at four beaches. By 2013, five beaches, including Great Bay, Lindbergh Bay, Cinnamon Bay, Trunk Bay and Pelican Cove, and two marinas, Crown Bay Marina and Green Kay Marina, were awarded Blue Flag status. In 2013, the territory also saw the implementation of the Blue Flag Ambassador program for boaters.

“On behalf of USVIHTA and VICS, I would like to thank Valerie for her hard work and countless volunteer hours. Without her determination and perseverance, this extraordinary accomplishment would probably still be in the planning stages. We are so fortunate to have someone in our community with such a commitment to protecting and enhancing our local environment,” Davis said.

Each year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency honors individuals, businesses and organizations that have contributed significantly to improving the environment and protecting public health in New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and eight federally recognized Indian Nations. Winners are recognized for their environmental achievement at a ceremony during Earth Week. The awards recognize achievement in six categories: individuals; business and industry; non-profit organization, environmental or community group; environmental education; federal, state, local or tribal government or agency; and print and broadcast media.

To be selected, nominees must have: significantly contributed to improving environmental quality in New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands during the prior year; demonstrated a high achievement level in the award category; and created unique or location-specific benefits, produced results that are sustainable or reproducible, or increased public involvement in environmental action.

For more information on Blue Flag USVI, visit <http://www.blueflagusvi.org/>. For more information on EPA and the Environmental Quality Award, visit <http://www.epa.gov/region2/eqa/>.