

# The BVI BEACON

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## Pickering promises labour upgrades

Residents give input  
By **CHRYSTALL KANYUCK**  
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About 150 residents came to the first in a planned series of labour discussions held by Deputy Premier Dr. Kedrick Pickering, the minister of natural resources and labour, last Thursday in East End. About 20 attendees rose to ask questions or air concerns about a range of issues, such as work permits, unemployment and employee grievances.

The idea to hold the meetings came to the minister soon after he took over the post, when he was faced with many complaints relating to labour, he said. "My head was swimming like

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Photo: TODD VANSICKLE

Obel Penn, along with his son, Ephraim, left, and grandson Marlon (R-D8), right, raise the Polish flag during a ceremony to honour Polish sailor and former Virgin Islands resident Wladek Wagner on Bellamy Cay Saturday afternoon.

## Polish sailor remembered at Trellis Bay

Event draws about 200 people

By **TODD VANSICKLE**  
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Wladek Wagner would have celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday this year. It is also the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death, and the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his departure on the voyage that would make him the first Pole to sail around the world.

"We have declared this is the year of Wagner," said Jerzy Knabe, commodore of London's Polish Yacht Club.

Mr. Knabe said it is time to honour Mr. Wagner, who called the Virgin Islands home for almost a decade.

Mr. Knabe is one of the organisers of the Wagner Sailing Rally, held this weekend at Trellis Bay. About 200 Polish sailors and visitors attended a plaque-unveiling ceremony Saturday afternoon on Bellamy Cay, paying tribute to Mr. Wagner.

"We decided it was time to get the memory of this Polish sailor back to the public," Mr. Knabe said. "He was forgotten because of historical events."

Mr. Wagner was the first Polish sailor to cir-

cumnavigate the world without an engine, Mr. Knabe said. It took three boats — *Zjawa*, *Zjawa II* and *Zjawa III* — and seven years to complete his voyage.

However, he could not return to Poland after the journey because World War II had broken out by 1939. While in England on the last leg of the trip, he received a telegram from the Polish general consul ordering him to abort the voyage because the Germans had attacked Poland, according to Mr. Knabe.

*Zjawa III* was requisitioned by the British Navy for war efforts and was later returned to Mr. Wagner, but he still did not return home because of Communist occupation of Poland. During the war he served on a merchant ship for the Polish Navy.

After the war, he started a fishing business and met his wife, Mabel. By 1949, the couple decided to sail from Dublin to Australia after selling the fishing business and *Zjawa III*.

They purchased a large yacht, *Rubicon*, and set sail. After they arrived in Port of Spain, Trinidad, however, they realised Mabel was pregnant with their daughter Suzanna, Mr. Knabe said. They

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## How British are the Virgin Islands?

Input still welcome on next white paper

By **CHRYSTALL KANYUCK**  
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If United Kingdom officials are serious about helping overseas territories like the Virgin Islands succeed, there's an easy step for them to take: Tell British travellers the territory exists, said a handful of residents who attended a Jan. 18 public meeting at the Sir Rupert Briercliffe Hall.

"I spent 10 days in London, and we are so disconnect," said Julio "Sam" Henry. "I mean nobody knows about the BVI unless you have a special particular reason to know about the BVI."

Mr. Henry, a taxi driver, spoke at a public meeting held to gather input on the next white paper outlining the UK's relationship with her territories.

New white papers are generally drawn up approximately every 10 years, said Najan Christopher, assistant secretary of external affairs in the Premier's Office. The last white paper, Partnership for Progress and Prosperity, was completed in 1999 and granted Virgin Islanders and

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# Sailor: Polish adventurer honoured

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abandoned their trip to Australia and eventually found themselves in the Virgin Islands.

In 1954 the couple bought Bellamy Cay, which is now home to the restaurant Last Resort, for \$75.

The Wagners called the VI home for nine years, and their son, Michael, was born here. Mr. Wagner built a shipyard, a home and a clubhouse on Bellamy Cay. Today, a stone structure he built houses a portion of the Last Resort restaurant. He also helped in the construction of the airstrip on Beef Island, Mr. Knabe said.

In 1958, the couple moved to Puerto Rico, where Mr. Wagner also built a marina — Wagner Shipyard & Marina. Eventually, they moved to Florida for health reasons. Mr. Wagner died there in 1992, never setting foot in Poland again after leaving for his around-the-world voyage.

## Ceremony

Last weekend, there were more than 30 charter sailboats in Trellis Bay flying red flags with a white eagle crest. As Polish music



blared from the Last Resort, final preparations were made to the Wagner memorial — a seaside seating area around a plaque atop a stone podium.

Guests arrived by dinghy, with some wearing captain's uniforms and others in historical naval costumes.

The Caribbean Republic of Sailors of Chicago, the Polish Yachting Association of North America and the Brotherhood of the Coast of Poland were among the organisations represented.

Virgin Islander Obel Penn, who worked with Mr. Wagner on construction projects and as a crewmember during a charter to Trinidad, attended the ceremony



Photos: TODD VANSICKLE

Members of the Brotherhood of the Coast of Poland unveil a plaque that honours late Polish sailor Wladek Wagner Saturday afternoon on Bellamy Cay.

with his son Ephraim Penn, daughter Juliette Penn and grandson Marlon Penn, the Eighth District representative.

"He employed plenty of people from the villages," Mr. Penn said of Mr. Wagner during a speech at the ceremony, adding, "When he left, we all missed him, especially me, because he was a very kind and friendly gentleman."

Mr. Penn took part in the ceremony during the raising of the Polish and VI flags. After the ceremony, attendees treated him like a celebrity, asking him for his autograph while cameramen interviewed him.

Mr. Wagner's widow, who lives in Florida, was unable to attend the ceremony due to health reasons. However, a letter she had written was read on her behalf.

"With his countless abilities it seemed there was nothing he could not do, no problem he could not solve," she wrote. "He never gave up. This was evident not only with his endeavours on the ocean, but also on land here at Trellis Bay."

Between Bellamy and Marina Cay the tall ship *Fryderyk Chopin*, named after the Polish composer, was anchored for the event. After the ceremony organisers and visitors toured the 180-foot training vessel.

"For us, Mr. Wagner was the first Polish man to sail around the world — it is very important for us to be here," *Fryderyk Chopin* deckhand Stefan Wronski said. "To see this island where our guy, a

Polish sailor, lived and built here — it was a must to be here."

On Monday, the Wagner Sailing Rally fleet raced to Great Harbour at Jost Van Dyke for the closing ceremony.

The rally was the first of several events scheduled to pay tribute to Mr. Wagner. A celebration will be held in Poland later this year to commemorate the start of his around-the-world voyage.

## Tourism

Ben Bamford, owner of the Last Resort restaurant, was still entertaining several Polish visitors with rum drinks on Monday afternoon. He thinks the memorial will serve as a tourist attraction for years to come.

"We now have a little piece of Poland on Bellamy Cay," Mr. Bamford said.

He was told that the *Fryderyk Chopin* will continue to visit the territory about every two weeks. As long as he raises the Polish flag, the ship's crew has agreed to come ashore to visit the memorial and patronise his business, he said.

"Quite a few tourists will come from Poland and visit this little landmark instead of other Caribbean islands," Mr. Bamford said. "It is good for the BVI as far as Polish tourism. For them it is a big deal."

# HARNEYS

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