

New St. John Recycling Center Sets Ambitious Agenda

By Tradewinds Staff - January 17, 2019

When Island Green Living Association's ReSource Depot closed its doors in December 2017, it was a blow for residents of St. John interested in recycling and sustainable living. But now all the pieces are in place to launch a new recycling center on St. John that will initiate comprehensive recycling programs as well as address a range of community needs.

Island Green Living Association has a new operations manager, a centrally located site, and a matching grant for \$100,000 to establish the Sustainable Living Center.

Anthony Novelli took over as operations manager of the ReSource Depot in January. With a degree in biology and experience working with a solar energy company, he is bringing fresh energy to a position that requires a roll-up-your-sleeves attitude along with the proper mix of idealism and practicality.



Doug White, IGLA co-founder, and Anthony Novelli, operations manager, take a break at Mongoose Junction.



Novelli often starts his day by checking the trash receptacles near the beaches on the North Shore where he collects bags full of discarded single-use water bottles and aluminum cans.

Anthony Novelli demonstrates can crushing process.

He brings back his bags of cans and bottles to the shell of a building in Susannaberg destined to become the new Sustainable Living Center. There, he uses equipment—mothballed for more than a year but still operable—to compact the cans into bales which can be sold to a recycling company.

Aluminum cans have a compaction rate of 13 to 1, according to Doug White, co-founder of IGLA. (To put it in other terms, one hundred gallons of aluminum cans can be reduced to 7.5 gallons through compaction.) Once the cans are crushed and put in bales, they'll be loaded into a 40-foot trailer and shipped to Atlanta. It takes 700,000 cans to fill a trailer. Novelis, the world's largest aluminum can recycling company, has agreed to pay \$.69 per pound to IGLA, according to White, but IGLA has to pay for the transport. "It's the shipping that kills recycling in the Caribbean," said White. "We always try to find a way to use materials for local production."

Social media was all abuzz this week with the announcement that St. John residents could participate in the plastic recycling program sponsored by the Environmental Association of St. Thomas at Plaza Extra. The word was out that volunteers on St. John would be collecting qualifying plastic to bring to St. Thomas on Saturday. Caribbean Solar was lending a truck for this purpose, and Love City Car Ferries was offering free transport by barge.

However, Novelli received notice on Thursday that this initiative was happening solely on a trial basis for this week only. Individuals who want to bag up their plastic water bottles and jugs and bring them to St. Thomas are welcome to do so, he said. [The E.A.S.T. program](#) is funded through March. Unfortunately, there is now no financial gain in sending plastic off-island for recycling, according to White, and acquiring technology to recycle plastic waste on a large scale is not on the immediate horizon for IGLA.

Recycling of aluminum cans is just the first of many recycling initiatives planned by IGLA for the Sustainable Living Center. In the near future, IGLA plans to start glass collection and crushing, set up operations to convert used cooking oil to biodiesel, and reopen the ReSource Depot—a site where islanders could drop off unwanted building materials, tools, and household items for low-cost resale.

All this will take place at the new Sustainable Living Center on property in Susannaberg, adjacent to the Transfer Station. Prior to Hurricane Irma, IGLA leased a one-half-acre parcel containing a run-down warehouse from the Virgin Islands Government for up to 35 years. Irma tore out the walls of the building, but Novelli has been able to use the site for compacting cans since WAPA has installed power.

Carlson Construction was given the contract to rebuild the structure, and White said he hopes the work will be completed by early summer. In the second phase of construction, IGLA plans to add two more stories. The top story, which will be designed at an elevation for easy street-level access from Centerline Road, will be used for retail space for the ReSource Depot and an arts and crafts gallery using recycled materials.

The middle level will be designed to serve as a safe room during hurricanes, but will more often be used for community meetings, educational programs, art workshops, and demonstrations of sustainable practices. The goal is to have zero energy costs and produce zero waste, said Novelli.

The initial funding for the project comes from a \$75,000 reconstruction grant from FEMA (since IGLA is a non-profit corporation.) IGLA hopes to raise \$500,000 more to complete the structure, build a storage facility, and improve the site with retaining walls made out of discarded tires.

This week IGLA officially launched its capital campaign to raise the funds. The immediate challenge is to raise the first \$100,000 by February 15 in order to take advantage of a matching-fund donation offered by a St. John resident.

“No amount is too little,” said Harith Wickrema, IGLA’s board president. “The United Nations has warned us that we have only a few years to limit a climate change catastrophe. Please ask your friends and neighbors to help preserve our paradise.” Donations may be made online at <https://islandgreenliving.org/donate/> or mailed to ILGA, P.O. Box 410, St. John, VI 00831.

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