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# Island Green takes lead on plastic recycling

By AANDREA MILAM St. John Correspondent  
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Alice Krall of the V.I. Waste Management Authority, left, snaps a selfie with Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. and Island Green Living President Harith Wickrema during Friday's ribbon cutting on Island Green Living's ocean-bound recycling program.

Daily News photo by ANDREA MILAM

After recycling more than 1.2 million cans and diverting nearly 700,000 pounds of waste from landfills via the ReSource Depot, Island Green Living is poised to make an impact on plastics that normally ends up in landfills.

The St. John nonprofit celebrated its ocean-bound plastics recycling program Friday with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

WellMed Medical Management, Inc. chairman and CEO George Rapier agreed during the ceremony to donate about \$30,000 to the new program, bridging the gap to the \$100,000 fundraising goal that triggers Island Green President Harith Wickrema's pledge to donate a matching \$100,000 himself.



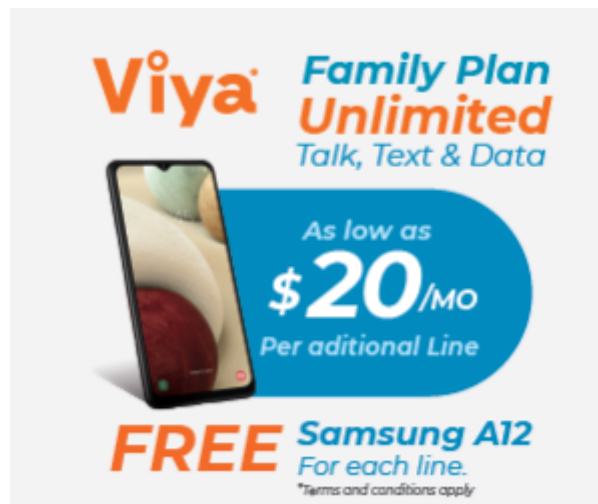
Wickrema took the opportunity to make some big asks during the event.

“Governor [Albert Bryan Jr.], please insist the Department of Tourism educate tourists about our toxic sunscreen law,” he said. “Delegate [Stacey] Plaskett, please help by introducing a national toxic sunscreen ban before our coral and marine life is gone for good. Senate President [Donna] Frett-Gregory, may we kindly ask you to communicate with your fellow senators and seek collaboration in introducing and passing styrofoam and single-use plastic hospitality amenity bans, as well as EV vs. fossil fuel vehicle importation guidelines.”

Island Green Living is now accepting rinsed number 1, 2, and 5 plastics at its ReSource Depot at Centerline and Giff Hill roads, behind the VITEMA building.

Giff Hill School 11th grader Ciena Clendinen, who arrived in tandem with a truck bed full of plastic collected by her fellow students for recycling, spoke of the importance of recycling today for future generations.

“My generation is one that will inherit the problems of today, and so I have a particular interest in working now to help change the path that we are on,” said Clendinen. “The typical single-use plastics, like water bottles and to-go food containers for example, take roughly 450 years to break down. Sometimes, when I do research for class, this issue feels too big to face, but I’m standing here today because I do believe each of us can make a difference in this problem by following the four Rs.”



The word “rethink” has been added to the original three Rs — reduce, reuse, and recycle, Clendinen said.

“You know who the most important person is here?” said Island Green Living board member Mark Lichtenstein. “Ciena. Ciena’s words were powerful and we’d do well to heed them. We need to listen to the youth of the world, because they get it.”

Plaskett shared a statistic she read recently. In 1900, 59% of natural use resources used by Americans were nonrenewable. In 1945, that number was up to 88%, and today, it’s at 94%.

“We need to be intentional with our consumption and actively engage in recycling to reduce pollution, protect our beautiful environment, and fight the climate crisis to ensure we sustain the planet for future generations,” she said.

Frett-Gregory lauded the plastics recycling launch and said she hopes it will be the beginning of recycling programs throughout the territory.

“We have the vision,” she said. “We just need the will.”

Bryan recalled his childhood in Savan, when recycling was a way of life. Cans were used to store items, then to grow seedlings. Herbs were grown in the yard rather than sold at a grocery store in plastic containers. Bones were fed to dogs, and leftover rice was fed to chickens.

“Nothing went in the garbage,” Bryan said. “When you think about how we started, that’s the right way to live. We’re suffering from the problem we created. We need to re-embrace what we already know. Today is a good step.”

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