



NEWSLETTER

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Design & Layout by Janika Perez of Vivid Xpression Media



Marianne River, Blanchisseuse

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SEASONS C H A N G E

By March of 2020 the global Corona Virus or COVID-19 pandemic had caught most of the world by surprise and few could have predicted the course which the year would take. Countries began closing borders, restricting the movement of people, and shutting down amenities and services. Here in Trinidad and Tobago, our daily routines were interrupted or totally stopped as in the case of the closure of schools throughout the nation. What was thought to be short term measures to combat the virus turned into months of uncertainty and instability for us all. The Adopt A River Programme was not immune to these impacts. Our work is heavily reliant on engaging with the public and other stakeholders, a task which was made almost impossible given the crisis.

The Unit's strategies and execution of normal face to face interactions and engagements had to be tailored to the new normal, which included social distancing. The internet became one of the best platforms for the Adopt A River Implementation Unit (AARP) to continue reaching persons and staying engaged with the public. In spite of the virus's presence and impact socially, economically and mentally; the AARP continued our work with various communities and upheld our mandate of providing education and awareness in watershed management and conservation.

WATER AND THE ENVIRONMENT

ART COMPETITION

The AARP's inaugural Art Competition was conceptualised to encourage both children and adults to express their thoughts on the theme of "Water and the Environment" through the medium of visual art. The competition was launched on May 17th on both the AARP's Instagram (IG) and Facebook (FB) platforms with the deadline for electronic submissions being June 3rd. All submissions were posted to the Adopt A River IG and FB pages on June 5th, 2020, to coincide with the commemoration of World Environment Day which is celebrated globally to raise awareness on environmental issues and encourage action for the protection of the environment. Showcasing the art pieces on this day gave a local perspective on water and the environment in Trinidad and Tobago as the artwork captured and depicted some of our environmental challenges as well as solutions.



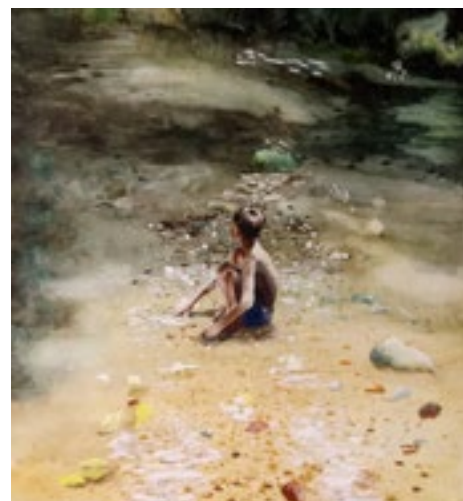
Artist: Lee-Ann Hypolite
WINNER 16 - 25



Artist: Natasha Mahabir-Persad
WINNER 26 and over



Artist: Aasera Dindial
RUNNER UP 15 and under



Artist: Aretha Baptiste
RUNNER UP 26 and over



Artist: Jesus McLeod
WINNER 15 and under



Artist: Rochelle Rawlins
RUNNER UP 16 - 25

The competition was well received with over 60 submissions being submitted by individuals ranging in ages from 6 years old up to 43 years. The art pieces garnering the most collective likes on both our IG and FB platforms were selected as winners in three age categories - 15 and under, 16 to 25 and 26 and over. In keeping with COVID-19 protocols a small prize giving ceremony was held on July 10th at the WASA Sports and Cultural Club to award 1st and 2nd place winners in each category with their prizes which included Samsung Galaxy Tablets, restaurant vouchers and photography services from Vivid Xpression Media. AARP memorabilia was also presented to the winners and the supportive parents of our young entrants.



From left: Jesus McLeod, Aasera Dindial, Natasha Mahabir-Persad and Lee-Ann Hypolite

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY



World Environment Day also called Eco Day, was established by the United Nations in 1972 at the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. The actual commemoration of the day occurred two years later in 1974 and was themed "Only One Earth". The day is celebrated on June 5th annually and is the principle flagship campaign for raising awareness on environmental issues and encouraging action for the protection of the environment. This year the theme was "Time for Nature" which also focused on the sub theme of "biodiversity".

The Adopt A River Programme commemorated the day by acknowledging the programme's mandate in watershed awareness and management, encouraged individuals to do an activity to help the environment which included less water usage, posted submissions from our virtual art competition entitled "Water and the Environment" and featured highlights of a tree planting exercise conducted in conjunction with the Moruga community members.

The Green Belt Project, in partnership with the AARP, also encouraged celebration of the environment by embarking on a Virtual Tree Planting exercise. This event extended through the month of June and engaged various groups throughout the country who were approached and participated in this event. These groups include the Ambience Project, Sangre Grande Conservation Group, Mundo Nuevo Sport and Epic Club, Santa Rosa First People's Community, Penal/Debe Foundation, Asa Wright Nature Centre, Cunupia Business Chamber and A.A.R.P. Youth Ambassador Luke Pounder. Support was provided by the Forestry Division who donated over 300 trees for the various exercises. These are some highlights of the day and month:



CASHEW GARDENS WATER WARRIORS

A Water Warriors training was held for members of the Cashew Gardens Community Council on August 5th, 2020. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, only a few members were chosen for training and all protocols were exercised to ensure safety to all present. Since some members of the community were trained 3 years prior, the group requested that this session be focused on the water quality testing aspect, therefore, the approach was tailored to their needs.

This training was specifically geared at polishing the skills of participants in preparation for water quality testing which the Council will engage in as part of their newly approved Green Fund Environment Project. Participants expressed that the current training gave a reenergizing push to continue the work previously started and a renewed commitment to creating and establishing water management projects in their community.



Our water warrior training encompasses both awareness and education on topics such as: pollution and its causes; the importance of water and its relation to the environment; watershed management; and water quality sampling and testing. The AARP will continue to educate and train communities like Cashew Gardens.

CHECKING UP ON OUR RIVERS



AARP staff members taking water samples at Valencia River

During the month of September, a series of water quality testing was undertaken. This was for the purpose of determining the status of our rivers and watersheds during a period of little or no use due to restrictions imposed on the public, as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic. As mandated by the Government, citizens were not permitted recreation at our rivers for several months due to the high risk such gatherings may have on the transmission of the virus.

The members of the AARP saw this as an opportunity to collect data which could be used as a new baseline to compare the state of our rivers during periods of high activity. Cunupia, Matura, Salybia, Valencia, Lopinot, Aripo, Caura, San Juan and Maracas, St Joseph were some of the Watersheds tested. There was

also the inclusion of new testing sites at D'Eau Blanc River in Blue Basin, and at Moon River and River of Hope in Moruga.

Since more persons were at home, there was decreased negative impact on water quality from human interaction and an increase in domestic waste. Overall, it was noted that a good pH level was present throughout the sites. We hope to continue our efforts in maintaining and improving the general health of our rivers and water quality by raising awareness, encouraging persons to keep safe environmental practices, and conserve our precious water resources, especially during this crucial time. Further water quality sampling will continue in the coming months as our rivers re-open to the general public.

WATER CONSERVATION AT MORUGA FARMS

The village of Moruga lies at the western end of the Trinity Hills and on the south-central coast of Trinidad. It is known for its many farms and has a history of family farming. In addition to agriculture, fishing also contributes to the economy of the area.



Members of the AARP Unit and Mr. Forgenie while exploring estates

Members of the AARP met with the Founder/Producer of Moruga Hill Rice Farmer Cooperative, Mark Forgenie to discuss a proposed collaboration to produce a video series highlighting farming in Moruga. The objective of the video is to encourage youths of



The Merikin Moruga Hill Rice

the community into farming activities; raise awareness of proper farming techniques, safe water use, and water conservation; and share the benefits of joining a cooperative with the aim of creating successful sustainable farm development within the Moruga community.

Mr. Forgenie took us on a tour of a few family estates in the area. These visits included the Vista Dorado Estate, Pedro Garcia Estate and Moon River. While touring the estates, we were able to see the many sustainable

practices Mr. Forgenie and other farmers employ in their day to day farming activities. We were also given insight into the processes involved in the manufacturing of the Moruga Hill Rice and the benefits it has on the land due to its limited need for water as seen in traditional rice cultivation. Rice loves water and thrives in coastal plains and marshes; however, this strain can happily thrive upland, on higher drier land. Water conservation is key in its production. Another sustainable measure seen was a man-made pond on one of the estates, which collects rainwater.



A manmade rainwater retention pond on one of the estates

CREATING BEAUTIFUL SPACES IN BLUE BASIN



Community members engaged in clean-up exercise



A clean-up exercise and beautification activity of the Blue Basin River and Waterfall at Beausejour, Diego Martin earlier this year, was followed up with the installation of anti-littering and anti-dumping signs, in an attempt to encourage citizens to keep the area clean and beautiful. The project was completed in collaboration with Councillor Alina Renn and the Beausejour Community Council which provided creative wording for one of the signs. Further monitoring and maintenance of the area will be carried out by members of the Beausejour Community Council and the Diego Martin Regional Corporation through Councillor Renn.

CAMERON HILL COMES ALIVE



Phases of Clean up on the Hill

Illegal dumping is one of the issues plaguing our watersheds not only marring the aesthetics of our beautiful natural environment but contaminating our rivers and groundwater as well. One such dumping site is the hillside community of Cameron Hill, Maraval which was the location of a clean-up and beautification drive spearheaded by the Adopt A River Programme in November. The project was a collaborative effort with Councillor Catherine Mendez along with members of the community. This included one resident who utilised his backhoe to clear the hillside leading down to the stream of a variety of large items such as appliances, chairs and construction material.

The clean-up exercise also included the installation of no-litter and beautification signs to dissuade dumping, as well as the installation of concrete posts positioned in a way to assist in curbing dumping. Trees and decorative shrubs will also be planted at the site to enhance its aesthetics and encourage the community to keep the site clean and free from waste. Some local farmers in the area have committed to monitor the site and deter others from

utilising it as a dump site. Future plans for the Cameron Hill community includes education and awareness building, and rainwater harvesting projects.



Councillor Catherine Mendez and community members prepare for clean-up



Community members organising materials for installation of signs

ON D' ROAD

WASA's Transport Division provided much needed support to our projects including the collection and delivery of materials at various sites across the island. The availability of additional vehicles and drivers from the Transport Division greatly contributed to achievements of the AARP in 2020. We would like to take the opportunity to extend our many thanks and appreciation for all the effort and assistance provided.



Transport vehicle loaded and ready to deliver materials at a project site

TRIMMINGS AND TREE PLANTING FOR MOKA



The scenic St. Andrew's Golf Club in Moka, Maraval was the location of a tree-planting exercise along the bank of the Maraval River which runs through the golf course before making its way to the lower reaches of Maraval. Observation by management at the golf course and persons in the community revealed that bamboo patches just outside of the golf course often fall into the riverbed and are swept away when there is heavy rainfall, obstructing the river and contributing to the flooding which sometimes takes place. In an effort to reduce the likelihood of this occurring, the AARP partnered with Councillor Andy Felician, the representative for Moka/Boissierre area, to remove some of the bamboo overhanging the river and at risk to falling in.

An engineer from the Diego Martin Regional Corporation (DMRC) visited the

site to identify which of the bamboo could be safely removed. Consultation was also done with nearby residents to ensure they were on-board with the plans for the area. The DMRC provided an excavator (which was transported to the site with assistance from the Defence Force) for the removal of the excess bamboo. The next stage was a tree planting exercise which was completed in November with participation from staff of the St. Andrew's Golf Course and Councillor Felician. Trees donated by the Forestry Division were planted along the upper and lower riverbank with the intent that this will help to control land slippage and erosion into the river. A follow-on phase of the project is under consideration to assist in remediation works to prevent further land slippage and erosion of the riverbank.



From left: Councillor A. Felician, Golf Course Superintendent V. Singh, AARP Outreach Officer E. Coker, Project Manager A. Alexander and Outreach Assistant J. Nichols

RAINWATER HARVESTING AT MUNDO NUEVO RC SCHOOL

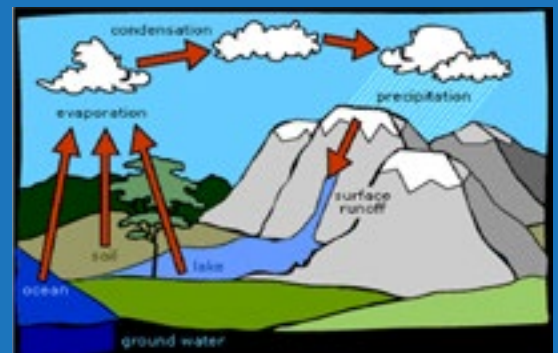
The small village of Mundo Nuevo, located in Talparo, is the site of the AARP's installation of a Rainwater Harvester (RWH) which was donated to the primary school. The RWH is intended to provide an additional source of water to the school to alleviate shortcomings in the supply of pipe-borne water, which at times necessitates the closing of school. The water collected through the RWH will be used for flushing toilets, washing hands and watering the school's garden. This addition will certainly help in creating a safe, healthy and functional environment for the children and staff at the school. Water is a commodity that is always in demand and as a result, signs were also installed indicating the value of this commodity, and the appropriate use for the contained rainwater.



The entire process of installing the rainwater harvester could not have been possible without the collaborative efforts of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation, Habitat for Humanity, The Green Belt Project, Mundo Nuevo Sport and Epic Club and the office of Mr. Foster Cummings, MP for the La Horquetta/Talparo area. Over the coming months the AARP will continue to engage with the Mundo Nuevo R.C. School and the wider community to educate them on RWH, water conservation and the protection of our water resources.



THERE IS NO NEW WATER



In a 100-year period, a water molecule spends 98 years in the ocean, 20 months as ice, about 2 weeks in lakes and rivers, and less than a week in the atmosphere.

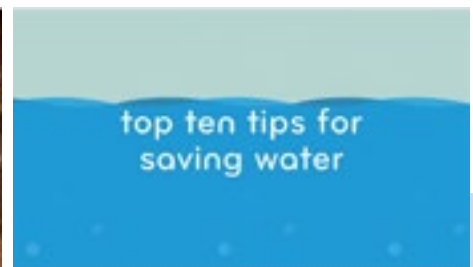
STAYING IN: REACHING OUT

Online education has become the standard nationally over the last school term and in keeping with these changing times the AARP has had to reimagine its schools' outreach and education programme to reach students where they are. Engaging our creativity the AARP has pivoted our in-person outreach activities to virtual outreaches, thereby finding a way to reach out while staying in. Research and preparation started in August and a pilot project was launched on November 4th 2020. Since then, Outreach staff have hosted online outreaches with students of Fyzabad Secondary School, Shiva Boys' Secondary School and the Hope Anglican Primary School in Tobago. Held on Zoom and Microsoft Teams, there has been approximately 250 primary and secondary school students engaged in these interactive virtual outreaches. Topics discussed included the importance of Watersheds, Water pollution and Water Conservation. Students were urged to become "Water Warriors" and do their part in protecting our precious water resources. At the end of the sessions students and teachers shared their excitement to have learnt about the role they can play in their watersheds.



Outreach staff (from left) Audra Francis, Kelisha Ray and LaTeisha Pierre facilitate an online outreach

Given the success of the Pilot Virtual Outreach Programme, plans are to host many more of these events in 2021 targeting schools and other groups. Though gathering restrictions remain in place, remember you can still safely reach out while staying in.



Some of the slides and tools used for the Online Outreach

TEAM AARP REACHING OUT IN VARIOUS COMMUNITIES

HERE ARE SOME HIGHLIGHTS:

WEST BEES, DIEGO MARTIN



UNCLE BEDDOE'S, SANTA CRUZ



COST CUTTERS, EL DORADO



Check our pages below for our **Water Conservation Tips, Know Your Watershed Series & AARP Tidbits.**

Facebook: **Adopt A River Trinidad & Tobago**

Instagram: **@adoptarivertt**