

# Using Sport For Social Change

***“Focus Virgin Island youth through sports and fitness, giving them the confidence they need to set personal goals, achieve their aspirations and create opportunity for themselves, their family and their community.”***

By Dean Doeling



Hello my friends, and Happy Holidays! Welcome to my second news letter regarding my “Sport For Social Change” initiative for the St. John U.S. Virgin Island youth. My hope is to keep everyone informed of my/our progress in focusing U.S. Virgin Island youth through sports and fitness.

## GOOD THINGS

Some very good things have happened over the last month since my first newsletter. I have spoken to many people on and off island,



Julius Sprauve School  
257 students

including people within Nike who want to become, or continue to be involved with this initiative. We have shared ideas on how we can get St. John youth involved in sustainable sports and fitness programs on the island, and are continuing to work together to make it a reality.

I was also asked to submit this initiative to the GameChangers web site, which is part of Ashoka’s Changemakers: <http://changemakers.net/> It was an honor to be asked to enter my initiative into this forum on Gamechangers. It is a web site to network with others like myself who have the desire to help youth through sports and fitness. There are also many other initiatives

worth looking at. If you care to see and comment on mine, as well as the others entered into the contest, please go to: <http://sportforchange.changemakers.net/en-us/node/14301>

Please take a moment to look through some of the other initiatives and give them your support via comments and/or suggestions. Your support, comments and ideas could actually make one of these initiatives happen for youth all over the world.



Giff Hill School  
180 students

## BOY GIVES LETTER TO GOVERNOR’S WIFE



Luca Costello with his letter to Saint John Governor de Jong

saying: “Dear Governor de Jongh, I wish there were more sports on St. John for schools and all ages. Happy Holidays, Luca Costello, 2nd Grade Giff hill School.” (see page 4 for actual letter)

Luca knew that he would have a chance to hand the letter to the Governor himself at a Christmas party

On Tuesday, December 9th, 2008, Luca Costello, a 7 year old boy who lives on the Island of St. John, decided on his own to give the Governor of St. John a letter

that the Governor puts on for the kids every year in the square. It just so happened that the Governor’s wife Cecile was on hand so Luca proudly gave it to her instead.

It warmed my heart to hear about this bright young man, who wishes so much that there were opportunities for kids of all ages to play sports on St. John.

“The soccer team that Luca belonged to is completely non-existent now.” says Luca’s Mother, Julie Simeck. “There was no one to coach it on a regular basis.” “The flag football (put on by the American legions) is only for the bigger kids.”

Even though Luca was feeling ill that day with the flu, he found it important enough to get dressed up in a shirt and tie and deliver his letter to Cecile at the Christmas party.



Guy Benjamin School  
73 students

The words in his letter speak volumes for all of the kids on St. John: **“Let us play.”**

## UPDATE!!!

On December 18, 2008 I received an email from Governor de Jongh stating that he was aware of my initiative and that it has been shared with the Commissioner of the Department of Housing, Parks, and Recreation, as well as with the St. John Administrator. “I appreciate your concepts and will follow up on your behalf.” he said. **Way to go Luca!**

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## “WE CAN PLAY..”



## “BUT WE CAN’T PLAY HERE.”

On November 19th, 2008, a not so wonderful article in the St. John Tradewinds newspaper, very clearly points out the fact that the youth of St. John have no where to play sports, even though the facilities are there. Pictured above is the Pine Peace basketball court which is purportedly under water for 9 months out of the year. Even when the court dries, players have to deal with the cracks in the court caused by the flooding, as well as the mold and the mosquitoes. According to the article written by the Tradewind Staff, “It is time to refurbish the court entirely..” (Can someone say NIKE GRIND?) In addition to the court problems, the grass around it needs to be cut, and the two play structures need to be cleaned and repaired.

The article goes on to say: “Due to the condition of the court, the basketball teams at Giffit Hill School will not be able to have any home games this year. (They have no indoor facilities) “Instead, the teams will have to travel to St. Thomas (a 40 minute commute by ferry) for all of their games. Not only will the Giffit Hill School students be affected, but so will the elementary students at the Julies E. Sprauve School.

The Giffit Hill School Athletic Director, Kent Wessinger states in the article: “Conscious decisions

of injustice towards our youth of St. John continue to hold back our youth from their fullest potential.” “It is sad to see that our students can’t even have a home game due to such an issue.”

Another advocate for St. John youth is Paul Devine, Athletic Director for the St. John Community Foundation, as well as an American Legion member. In a letter written to me in response to my first newsletter, Paul writes: “...the VI Government has not been proactive in regard to St. John youth. The facilities here are so lacking that some have not been invested in for over 30 years.”

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## SOME SPORTS DO EXIST...BUT

Paul Devine (see above) started a citizen run coed flag football program for older St. John youth, and over the past two and a half years, has been able to serve over 100 children. “Not only have we given children an opportunity to play sports, we have, for many children, allowed them to work as a team for the first time in their lives.” Paul says. “This has brought youth who ordinarily would not socialize to become close friends and school mates. Moreover, the parents of these fine children have become closer. I believe strongly that we have, in a small way, set a tone for others to follow in terms of bringing a community which was separated racially, economically and socially together. So, although this is a youth program, the results are a stronger community at all age levels.”

However, Paul goes on to say that the field his kids play on is in horrible disrepair: “The field that is available to us- The National Park

Field in Cruz Bay, is in terrible shape. Most of the grassy areas are gone and the surface is primarily rock-strewn. The mostly clay surface, which was dredge material from the local “creek” is extremely slippery when it rains making for an unsafe play area.”

“The government simply cannot help because of lack of funding. This has been true for so many years that people have given up hope. Citizens groups are now providing that hope and we intend to continue to do so. The American Legion and other organizations who have contributed to our local sports programs, completely agree with the concept of using sports as a means to affect social change. We experience it all year long through our sports programs. The results are amazing and heartening.”

“The American Legion Post 131 on St. John will be introducing youth coed softball in the spring, 2009. We feel that having two sports per year would give the youth a better all-around experience. Starting in 2009, we will sponsor spring softball and fall flag football. We are doing this with a bit of trepidation for several reasons.”

Through a citizens’ initiative, started by Paul, He has partnered with the Department of Housing, Parks and Recreation (DHPR) who has agreed to allow volunteers to rebuild the field, replace the worn perimeter fencing and demolish and replace the crumbling dugouts. “The DHPR has no funds” Paul says, “and most likely (won’t) given the economic state we face.”

Paul says: “They have agreed, however to provide permits, permissions and will help with some of the materials such as topsoil and seed.

(cont. pg. 3)

All other work will be through volunteer construction firms, individuals and civil engineering companies. It is estimated that the project would cost well over \$290,000 if done by competitive bid.

“Our problem is we cannot provide funding for that work which will require some excavation, (nor can we find) a contractor to provide this on a volunteer basis. We would need approximately \$32,000 in donations to complete the project. This lack of funding may put the project in jeopardy but will continue hoping that the funding will come.”

Paul added that once the project is completed, they would have a safe field for children to play on for many years to come. “Our new youth programs will become a reality without the fear of children being injured on a somewhat dangerous playing surface.”

“We cannot do it all ourselves forever. It is a shame that citizens have to provide what the government has failed to do, but we are willing and we will persevere. Any help we can get would be welcome.”

When I asked Paul how Nike or others could help in some way, he responded: “Since most of our efforts, time and money will be going into the renovation project, we will have little left over to outfit the softball teams. We are planning on four teams to start with six for 2010. Each 14-member team will require helmets, catchers equipment, bats, balls, uniforms, practice equipment and team bags. We estimate the cost to be well over \$4000 not including the necessary insurance. Families here are very poor and cannot afford to purchase this equipment for their children. The American Legion and its sponsors must provide complete outfitting and charge each player a minimal fee. Since most of

our available funds will be dedicated to the field renovation, we will be sorely lacking funds for team equipment.”

Paul’s hopes are that Nike or some other organization or person reading this will be able to donate the needed equipment to these teams.

Paul also sent me a video made by the youth of St. John, that shows exactly what he and others are talking about. It can be viewed by clicking below, or by copying and pasting it into your web browser:

Part one:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1RWGd9hxcS>

Part two:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSVzir4e-Ks>

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### “8 TUFF MILES” College Scholarship program needs your help.

February 28, 2009 will be the 13th Annual “8 Tuff Miles” foot race held on St. John. Since 2003, raising the scholarship money has not been an issue. But in this economy, this year is an exception. According to race director Peter Alter: “For awhile I was thinking about suspending the college scholarships for a year or so until the economy corrects itself but then I thought that’s not the way to lead. Instead I am asking everyone to help with this part of 8 Tuff Miles. If I can convince you to send me any amount of money we will raise the funds necessary to fund these awards. The total amount we need this year is \$4600.00.” Currently they are at \$760.00. “...a long way from the finish line.”

Luigi Costello, a business owner on St. John has been the major con-

tributor for this race over the years. This year however, he says: “I would of loved to donate the \$4600 again this year to the 8TM race but simply cannot. In all my years of self employment these are the scariest to say the least.”

These scholarships are awarded to the first place boy and girl in the three youngest age groups.

The three youngest age groups are as follows:

12 and under, 13 to 16, and 17 to 19. A total of 6 prizes are awarded each year.

The first place boy and the first place girl in the 12 and under age group each receive a college scholarship in the amount of \$500.00.

The first place boy and the first place girl in the 13 to 16 age group each receive a college scholarship in the amount of \$800.00.

The first place boy and the first place girl in the 17 to 19 age group each receive a college scholarship in the amount of \$1000.00.

The scholarships mean so much to the kids. It would be a shame if it wasn’t available to them this year.

If you would like to know more about the race, please go to: [www.8stuffmiles.com](http://www.8stuffmiles.com). If you would like to donate, even as little as \$5.00, you can do so by going to:

[www.active.com/donate/8stuffmilesCSF](http://www.active.com/donate/8stuffmilesCSF)

You may also send a check to:

**Peter Alter  
PO Box 1214,  
St. John, VI.  
00831**

Checks should be made payable to the St. John Landsharks.

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*Thank you for reading. Happy holidays!*

Dean R. Doeling  
Senior Production Artist  
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Actual letter from Luca to Governor de Jongh

12-8-0

Dear Governor deJongh,  
I wish there were more sports on  
St. John for all schools and all ages.



Happy Holidays,

Luca Costello

2nd Grade Giffit Hill School

