

SJHS Announces Significant Donation Toward Building Effort at 40th Anniversary Party

The St. John Historical Society is one step closer to realizing its dream of creating a permanent home thanks to an anonymous \$100,000 donation announced at the society's 40th anniversary party on Tuesday evening, March 11, at the Battery.

News of the donation, which was announced to the crowd of nearly 100 attendees by SJHS President Lonnie Willis, was met with gasps and a round of applause.

"We know that hard work and dedication are needed to make the Historical Society's plans come alive, and have no doubt that the SJHS board is willing to put forth this effort," Willis read from a letter sent to the society by the anonymous donor. "It is a pleasure to provide this donation to an organization whose purpose is to interpret, preserve, and share the history and heritage of an island we have grown to love. To ensure the society's continued success and improve its ability to share the story of St. John in multiple and memorable ways, it is our hope that this contribution will encourage others in the community to also recognize and support the world-class efforts of this organization and its all-volunteer board."

The SJHS announced in April 2013 it had signed a 99-year lease with the St. John Community Foundation for a portion of the foundation's parcel at Estate Bellevue. The vision for this home, to be called the St. John Cultural and Historical Resource Center, includes a climate-controlled archive and museum/exhibit area, as well as meeting space and room for future expansion. It will be located nearby the historic ruins on the estate. The SJHS, working hand in hand with the SJCF, will play a key role in developing and preserving the site and making it available to the public.

"This incredibly generous anonymous contribution is the impetus that this organization needs to move us forward into phase two of our plans for the St. John Cultural and Historical Resource Center," said Willis. "Phase one was 'imagining,' and phase two will be 'creating.' We are so thankful for this contribution, and I hope it will spur others to make similar commitments to our society and to our island."

Longtime board member Rafe Boulon, who grew up on St. John in the mid- to late-20th century, lauded the donation as a stepping stone to receiving further donations.

"I would say that this donation represents the incredibly important and substantial seed money for the society to be able to attract the additional funding necessary to achieve our goal of constructing an archive, office, and museum on the Bellevue property," he said. "This is far and away the largest donation the society has ever received, and is an affirmation of the society's significance to St. John and a belief in what this all-volunteer society can do in the future."

Eleanor Gibney, also a longtime board member who grew up on St. John, echoed Boulon's sentiments.

"The society is honored by this wonderfully generous gift," said Gibney. "Far beyond the immediate boost to the society and our building plans, it's an investment in the future of St. John."

To donate to the society's building effort, please contact Willis at contactus@stjohnhistoricalsociety.org.