



NEWSLETTER

Community Disaster Response | Beekeeping Initiative | New Board Members

WELCOME

The Exuma Foundation is very pleased to welcome three new board members to our organization. Under the leadership of Mr. Peter Whitehead, we look forward to even greater vision and strategic thinking to help us meet our mission to enhance the quality of life for the people of Exuma through education, youth development, environmental sustainability, and community support. We wish to thank Mr. Barry Benjamin for his service to the Exuma Foundation as President over the past two years. Learn more on page 4.

THANK YOU

The Exuma School for Exceptional Learners welcomes qualified volunteers. Many thanks to Betsy, Karen and Alicia for working with the ESEL students in February.



Mrs. Pamela Gorte, Exuma School District Superintendent at George Town Primary School preparing to distribute food vouchers.

SOCIAL OUTREACH

Community Disaster Response

Since the devastation of Hurricane Dorian, islands throughout The Bahamas have been feeling economic and social strain. In the fall of 2019, many families from Abaco and Grand Bahama came to Exuma in search of a new beginning. The Exuma Foundation and the community responded to help those in need, but the situation revealed many challenges that are faced on the island even during more prosperous times such as access to affordable housing.

The 2020 tourism season was off to a great start for Exuma when the COVID-19 pandemic took hold and brought our economy to a halt. There are now many without jobs and it seems inevitable that this critical situation will continue into the coming months. The Exuma Foundation is adjusting to our new realities here on the ground, while working to assist those in our community.

The following is a summary of what we have done so far to respond during these back-to-back disasters. Our board is

THANK YOU

Starve Poverty International, a New Jersey-based non-profit organization used their week-long visit in January to build an open-air lunch pavilion at L.N. Coakley High School, repair homes in Steventon, Rolleville and Jollie Hall, and put on a new roof on the Regatta Pavilion in George Town. The Exuma Foundation covers the majority of the cost of materials for these projects and provides accommodations for SPI's volunteers. We appreciate the shared responsibility felt by Ron Fraser and his team for ensuring that those most in need receive assistance to improve their quality of life.

Fyre Fundraiser Update

The Exuma Foundation has been working with a local committee to oversee the distribution of funds raised through GoFundMe to assist workers left without payment after the failed Fyre Festival. So far, \$61,000 of the \$75,300 raised has been distributed to 198 workers. The fundraiser attracted donations from 1,300 persons from across the globe including the director of the Netflix documentary, Chris Smith. Thanks to Jeff Todd of the Exuma Foundation of Canada for facilitating the connection to Fyre Festival organizers that made this effort possible. Here's more on the effort in the [Nassau Guardian](#).

working hard to form a strategic plan that will guide and sustain our efforts into the future. As we navigate through these extremely uncertain times, we will focus on the immediate needs of providing food and housing assistance.



Lines outside of all of the food stores became a normal experience for several weeks. Food security has become a major topic of conversation in The Bahamas.

Food Assistance

With the help of very generous donors, \$33,591 was raised to support students from Abaco and Grand Bahama whose families moved to Exuma after Hurricane Dorian. Working with our capable partners at the Ministry of Education including the District Superintendent, principals, and lunch vendors, the program covered the cost of 4,129 school lunches and served up to 55 students at George Town Primary and LN Coakley High School each day before the schools closed in March.



Left to right: Mr. Emmett Saunders of Ministry of Tourism, Mr. Danny Strachan of the Exuma Foundation, Ms. Sarah Swainson of Watermakers Air, Mrs. Pamela Gorte of the Ministry of Education, and Mr. Pedro Rolle of the Chamber of Commerce present a check from Staniel Cay Yacht Club and Makers Air to support the school lunch program.

Special thanks to Sarah Swainson and the donors that supported the Staniel Cay Yacht Club and Makers Air fundraiser for their amazing donation to this cause. In addition to the school lunch program, we began distribution of food vouchers through St. Andrews Anglican Parish after Hurricane Dorian. After COVID-19 restrictions took effect, we extended our use of food vouchers to continue providing for students and other families in need. As of May 1, \$9,500 in food vouchers have been distributed.

Affordable Housing

Affordable housing continues to be a major challenge in Exuma. Although we have not received government permission to move forward with plans to renovate the medical clinics as we had hoped, we have been able to provide rental assistance and accommodations for displaced families on the island. The Exuma Foundation serves on a committee of local partners, including the Department of Social Services, to manage an emergency shelter in Rolleville. The shelter has undergone extensive renovations in the past year thanks to Starve Poverty International and donors to our social outreach program. After Hurricane Dorian, the Sandals Foundation committed to completing those renovations in anticipation of providing accommodations for Hurricane Dorian survivors. Other generous donors helped to outfit the units with new appliances, beds, and linens. Four single mothers and twelve children have received housing assistance.

The Exuma Foundation gladly accepts donations towards the food voucher and affordable housing programs. By working with our local partners, we ensure our support is timely and received by those most in need. Contributions by U.S. and Canadian citizens may receive a tax deduction.

ENVIRONMENT

Beekeeping Initiative Highlights

It's the peak of honey-making season and Exuma's honeybees are working hard through curfews and lockdowns. Exuma's beekeepers are keeping up! In total there are now at least 15 beekeepers, equally representing women, men and youth on the island. We estimate there are 150 hives or more. If they keep up the pace, Exuma could soon represent the most productive beekeeping community in The Bahamas.

As the production of honey grows, one of the goals of the Exuma Beekeeping Initiative is to find new markets and ways for the beekeepers to realize economic benefit from their hobby. In February, to bring attention to the best honey in the world, we introduced the first ever Exuma Honey Fest at the Annual Exuma Garden Club Plant & Bake Sale on our campus. Besides the usual fantastic offerings by the Garden Club, there were raffle drawings for large quantities of honey, honey baked goods, wax wraps and bee butters, apiary tours, waggle dance competitions, and of course lots of honey for sale. It was great fun and really successful day for all the vendors. We look forward to a bigger and better event next year!



Honey comb and cheese is served by Sam Glasson at the Exuma Garden Club Plant Sale featuring Honey Fest.

Exuma Beekeeping in the News!

The Exuma Foundation and our Beekeeping Initiative continue to benefit from our partnership with the Savannah Bee Company and the Bee Cause Project through high-profile media coverage. Check out these recent articles in Forbes and Garden & Gun featuring our hero, Ted Dennard! Visit @thebeecause on Instagram to learn more!

NEW BOARD MEMBERS & PRESIDENT

Matt Balitsaris

Matt has been a frequent visitor to Exuma since 1979. When on the island, he and his wife Margaret are residents of Simons Point. He is a musician, record producer and founder of the Palmetto Jazz Record Label. Matt has served on the boards of the Center for International Policy and as Chair of Fonkoze, USA. He currently serves on the board of the Washington Office on Latin America. Matt and Margaret are long time supporters of the Exuma Foundation.

Howard Chang

Howard Chang and his wife Michele fell in love with Exuma and purchased a house on Jimmy Hill beach in 2013. In 2015, the couple co-founded Exuma's Tour du Turquoise charity bike ride. He runs a successful marketing technology company in Toronto committed to a triple bottom line of: People, Planet, Profits. He has led many fund-raising campaigns and served on Government, Industry and Not for Profit boards for over 2 decades. Howard and Michele have 3 adult children.

Bob Coughlin

Bob and his wife Jeanne, reside in Cincinnati, Ohio and have four children ages 17-24. Having recently built a house on Tar Bay, they look forward to becoming a positive member of the Exuma community. Bob has 29 years' experience as Founder and CEO of Paycor. He has served on numerous boards including the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens, the Cincinnati Bike Trail Committee, the Cincinnati Flying Pig Marathon (founder) and the Young President's Organization.

Peter Whitehead

Peter has lived all his life in The Bahamas and is an avid fisher, golfer, tennis player and musician. He and his wife Analia have residences in Nassau and Exuma. Peter is the Founder and President of Osprey Construction and Gunite Pools. He currently serves as the Deputy Chairman of the Bahamas Technical & Vocational Institute and is on several boards including the University of The Bahamas. He is a Young President's Organization member. Peter and Analia have four adult children.

Things we'll miss this Spring...

1. Growing food in schools: We are committed to improving food security and inspiring the next generations of farmers through our GROW Exuma, Sow My Dream and primary school gardening programs. Fortunately, we're able to continue with minimal activities as essential workers, but can't wait to get the students involved again.

2. Sailing: Each year the Exuma Foundation directs nearly all of our staff time and many other resources to supporting the National Family Island Regatta during the last weeks in April. It's hard to believe this major sporting event for the island and the country had to be cancelled. 2021 is bound to be better than ever!

3. Visiting groups: The Exuma Foundation has formed a partnership with the Exuma Naturalist Project, an educational program that facilitates programs for visiting school groups in Exuma. Five of these trips had to be postponed until next year. We are excited to host the ENP and are very happy that we will see them next year.

We Need Your Support!

Visit our website to learn how to make a **tax deductible donation** or an **online donation**.

If you'd like more information or have questions about how else to get involved, it's easy to do through **our online contact form**.

You can always email us directly at: **exumafoundation@gmail.com**.

And of course, feel free to **call 242-336-2790** or **visit us** in Exuma!

Thank you!

