



# What's Happening

## 2015 Woman-Owned Business of the Year (St. Thomas)

Phantasea Tropical Botanical Garden

Patsy Breunlin



In February of 2015 Patsy opened her new business - Phantasea Tropical Botanical Garden - located just East of Fairchild Park on the lush Northside of St. Thomas.

Patsy grew up in South Florida with a mother who loved the outdoors and gardening as well as being influenced by her grandmother's love of plants. After moving to North Florida to go to college and living there for 15 years she was ready to move somewhere further South to get away from the cold weather. So after visiting some friends in the fall of 1987 who were living on St. Thomas, she decided to move to the Virgin Islands.

Already a plant lover at that time, she brought with her not only her household goods but her plant collection. For six years she travelled around the island looking for the perfect place where one day she could put all her plants in the ground and on the trees where they preferred to live. She finally found a property located on the Northside which, although totally overgrown with vines, grasses, and other invasive plants, had great potential. It was after Hurricane Marilyn in 1995 that she started to remove the unwanted invasive plants and was able to actually see what the property looked like. It already had a few stone walls terracing some areas and lots of large mature and varied trees.

Motivated by her love of the tropical plant world, which she had encountered while traveling for vacation to Hawaii during her college years, and her frequent visits to botanical gardens, Patsy set out to create her own tropical paradise full of orchids, bromeliads, heliconias, and other unusual tropical plants throughout her property on St. Thomas. After a friend told her one day that her garden was "just too good not to share with others" and realizing that botanical gardens were allowed in her zoning area, Patsy decided that she would create a traditional botanical garden for the island of St. Thomas since it did not have one already. She obtained the business license in 2000 and slowly set about to create the garden paths, steps, planting areas and collect and install new plants throughout the garden. Being an architect and general contractor helped her with the design and construction of the garden features and buildings. In June of 2013 she decided that it was finally time to open the garden to the public and began to write her business plan to obtain the necessary financing for the buildings. The SBDC assisted in reviewing the plan and consulting on her financing options. The loan was obtained and construction began on the buildings and parking in June of 2014 and on Feb. 7, 2015 the gates to the business were finally opened to the public.

Phantasea Tropical Botanical Garden has been a 20 year labor of love where the dream of one day opening the garden to the public as a business finally came to fruition. All gardens are a work in progress and the current five year business plan includes many more features yet to come.

