

# Managers ask about hurricane plans and tourist safety at disaster seminar

COLE BAY--Hotel managers asked government officials on Tuesday about mobility passes for the hurricane season and plans to transport tourists safely off the island after a disaster.

More than 100 representatives of hotels, insurance firms and other businesses attended a one-day seminar about disaster management hosted by a local tourism industry group.

A manager wanted to know whether there was a policy to fly out visitors who are injured on-island. Another asked about how much freedom recipients of hurricane passes receive.

St. Maarten Hospital-ity and Trade Association (SHTA) invited businesses to the seminar to explain to them government's plan for emergencies and to teach them about hurricanes and how they could prepare.

"I think sometimes we're too complacent," said SHTA Executive Director Karen Hana. "You've got to be prepared at all times."

Prime Minister Sarah Wescot-Williams has urged residents to think ahead about disaster, urging them to remain alert.

Guests to whom *The Daily Herald* talked said they appreciated the seminar.

Theresa Maccow manages the Rooms Division at Simpson Bay Resort. She said her staff recently had been unable to explain to relatives of a guest who nearly drowned how to fly him off the island for further care. "We didn't know how to give them the correct answer," Maccow told this newspaper after the session.

She said she had enjoyed the session because "you get to hear what other peo-



Camille Ashby of Port de Plaisance speaks at a one-day seminar on hurricane preparedness on Tuesday. She was one of many resort managers who wanted information about mobility during storms and policies for handling guests.

ple are thinking." She appreciated the answer from SXM Airport

Operations Division head Larry Donker, who said the airport would help liaise between the hotel and airline and bring aircraft in "once we can guarantee safe conditions" for departures and landings. He said these conditions applied to emergency medical flights with one other stipulation: The company doctor also has to agree.

Camille Ashby of Port de Plaisance asked about hurricane mobility passes.

Calvin Turner of Belair Beach Hotel asked about a general policy from government about handling and communicating with tourists during emergencies.

A government head told the attendees that keeping businesses running was important to the island's recovery. Government gives priority to restoring commercial districts in Philipsburg and Simpson Bay after disasters because the

past."

SHTA decided to host the session in the last week of July because, Hana said, administrators wanted hurricane safety to be forefront in the minds of business representatives when the active part of the season starts in mid- to late August.

"We [wanted] it to be just before the start of the season. ... If we start in June, people weren't going to remember," Hana said.

Forecasters predict an above-average hurricane season with 13 to 20 storms. Already four named storms, including the just-passed Tropical Storm Dorian, have formed. A weather expert said the storms' timing could serve as a reminder for residents. He said he hoped the forecasts were off.

"When dealing with an above-average season, I say, it is best we get this wrong," said local Meteorological Office head Joseph Isaacs.

Prime Minister Sarah Wescot-Williams said planning was the best way to prevent a major disaster on the island. "We need to remind ourselves that we are in the hurricane belt and that a storm can happen at any time during the season," she said in opening statements at the seminar. "Of course, we pray that ... St. Maarten is spared from any national disaster. However, preparedness is key."

island's livelihood depends on visitors spending money here, he said. "We make choices and we make them based on economics. It's that simple."

A local disaster expert insisted that each business owner had an individual responsibility to ensure his/her property was secure, but encouraged a shared attitude toward disaster control. He said that given the government's emergency plan, the island could handle a hurricane.

"We are pretty well prepared. Of course, you can never be 100 per cent prepared," said Disaster Management section head Paul Martens, adding, "We are better prepared than in the

## WINAIR TO EXPAND PRESENCE

Continued from page 1.

the footing in the Caribbean it lost when it almost went belly-up. However, the airline is confident that its schedule and pricing for these new routes will be attractive and competitive.

"A flight on the ATR to Santo Domingo will only take 15 minutes longer than a jet aircraft, but the cost is much less; hence, our competitive ticket prices which will be revealed in time to come," the airline tells its followers on Facebook.

As expected, servicing Santo Domingo prompted immediate questions about a St. Maarten-Puerto Rico route, which JetBlue now services exclusively. JetBlue installed a second daily flight on the route recently that is very popular among local travellers.

Winair has made no indications about a possible Puerto Rico route and did not expound on possible flights to the Southern Caribbean as some of its followers on Facebook also suggested. However, *The Daily Herald* understands that Puerto Rico is definitely in the picture.

The ATR-72 is a twin-engine turboprop short-

haul regional airliner built by the French-Italian aircraft manufacturer ATR. A stretched variant of the ATR-42, the aircraft seats up to 78 passengers in a single-class configuration and is operated by a two-pilot crew.

The ATR-72 was developed from the ATR-42 to increase the seating capacity from 48 to 78 by stretching the fuselage by 4.5 metres (15 feet), increasing the wingspan, adding more powerful engines and increasing fuel capacity by approximately 10 per cent. More than 400 ATR-72s have been delivered worldwide. Winair has started accepting applications for flight attendants to service the ATR. As for the pilots,

although management has not made any official announcement, when smaller airlines take on bigger aircraft, the arrangement is usually what is called a "wet-lease arrangement" whereby pilots certified for the larger aircraft come along with the aircraft, typically in the initial stages of the new operation.

Winair's pilots currently fly Twin Otter aircraft and will have to be retrained (type rating) to be certified to fly ATR-72s. It is also unclear how many of these aircraft the company intends to lease. Management said it would announce details of the new routes and the aircraft soon.

**SUNNY FOODS**  
**DAILY BUFFET**  
**DAILY NUTRITION**  
**FOR THE BEST PRICE ON THE ISLAND**  
**COME SEE US AT**  
 #32 A.TH. ILLIDGE ROAD, Philipsburg, St. Maarten, N.A.  
 Phone: (599) 542-5512 Fax: (599) 543-0215  
 Email: stevenh@caribserve.net

**WE DO WEDDINGS & more**  
 SXM Party Rentals N.V.  
  
 PARTY RENTALS & MANAGEMENT  
 e-mail: rflorijn@gmail.com  
 Cell: (1-721) 588-1200 • Tel: (1-721) 542-3806

**CASH FOR GOLD!**  
**BRING IN YOUR GOLD!**  
**ISLAND TOP GOLD BUYER**  
**HIGHEST PAYOUT GUARANTEED!!!**  
**RG RADIANT GEMS**  
**CALL US: 542-9111**  
**74/B FRONT STREET (BETWEEN COLISEUM CASINO AND MC DONALDS)**

**GEBE**  
 The power to serve

**24-HOUR EMERGENCY SERVICE**  
**TEL: 544-3100**

**GEBESMS**  
**Keeping You Current**  
 Text your contract account number <space> ON to 4323  
 visit www.nvgebe.com for details