

LAND CONSERVANCY HIRES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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Nearly 10 years after its formation, the St. John Land Conservancy has hired its first paid executive director to help further the nonprofit's mission to preserve land with important natural and historical beauty. The group, which formed with the initial goal of saving South Haulover on Round Bay from a planned 28-unit condominium development, recently announced the hiring of Alisha Kauffman, a longtime board member, to fill the executive director position.

"We needed someone to keep lighting fires under everyone to keep us all moving forward coherently, and it came to us that the position requires a lot of knowledge of what we've all been doing over the last few years," said St. John Land Conservancy Board President Raf Muilenburg.

"Alisha's taken this very part-time role, only 10 hours a week for now, and like she's always done, she's volunteering four times more than that for which we're immensely grateful.

She's a true powerhouse." Kauffman, who moved to St. John in 2014 from Dayton, Ohio, said she grew up in a family of naturalists who spent a lot of time volunteering."

"I visited St. John in 2005 and I immediately fell in love," she said. "I knew that I wanted to be involved with the Land Conservancy as soon as I heard about it, so I reached out to them asking if I could volunteer."

Kauffman started her role with the conservation-centric nonprofit by focusing on fundraising and helping organize the Land Conservancy's annual chili cookoff.

"I spent four years on the board, learning a lot about what the Land Conservancy was and trying to find my place, where I could help the most," she said.

The transition from board member to executive director was a natural one for Kauffman, according to her and Muilenburg.

When news of Kauffman's hiring made the rounds on social media, the Land Conservancy faced push-back for not considering an ancestral St. Johnian for the position, Muilenburg said the organization and structure Kaufman's leadership will bring to the Land Conservancy will

open up opportunities for everyone in the community to be involved in future endeavors.

“We’re here with open arms for everybody,” he said. “We have many ways people can get involved. We’re eager to have more people join our organization as volunteers.”

“One of my main goals is to make opportunities for people to come and be a part of the Land Conservancy,” Kauffman added. “There’s something broken between what we do and what the public thinks we do. I would like the community to come forward and ask questions, and I us to put ourselves out there, to be more open and more public.”

In addition to the South Haulover property, which the Land Conservancy purchased and donated to the Virgin Islands National Park, the nonprofit was gifted a property on Lovango Cay’s east end, which is a little more than an acre, in 2016. The organization’s goal is not to add land to the VINP, Muilenburg clarified.

“We’re not connected with the park but giving South Haulover to the park was a necessary requirement of that deal,” he said. “Our goal is for us to hold parcels, just like we’re doing with the Lovango parcel, to be open for public enjoyment to the extent it

can be done and in whatever form makes the most sense. We certainly anticipate allowing public access to any future parcels.”

The St. John Land

Conservancy has also faced criticism for making more land undevelopable on an island where the majority of land belongs to the VINP.

“We’re primarily about preserving natural and historical land more than anything else,” said Muilenburg. “Some land trusts do agricultural type projects and that’s something we could get involved with at some point, though it’s not been our initial focus.”

Kauffman said she’s dedicated to maintaining open communication with interested residents, and notes she’ll continue to give her time beyond the 10 hours per week for which she’s paid.

“I want to be accessible and answer every email, every question, whether it’s someone who’s upset or not,” she said. “I want to get everybody on the same page, and I think within the next five years, the St. John Land Conservancy can be viewed as a good organization for all. I feel positive about my new position. I just want to help preserve the most historic and beautiful places on St. John.”

To learn more about the St. John Land Conservancy or to donate to the nonprofit, visit

www.stjohnlandconservancy.org

To contact Alisha Kauffman directly, email her at momwindfire@gmail.com



St. John Land Conservancy Volunteer Opportunities:

- The SJLC is need of volunteers to assist with a number of different initiatives. Below is a list of how people can help. To sign up to volunteer, email sjlcvolunteers@gmail.com
- Organizing and selling t-shirts and merchandise, preferably with retail experience. Several people are needed.
- Setup filing, mailing orders for the SJLC online store.
- Creating and sending social media content. Email photos, videos, and text to info@stjohnlandconservancy.org
- Organizing and leading beach cleanups and supporting community recycling efforts.
- Planning and organizing events like the annual chili cookoff and music festival once large gatherings are safe again.
- People are needed to be part of SJLC's existing informal advisory group, to help the organization set priorities and other matters.
- Leaders who will help with fundraising and development, and who have great ideas on how to help the organization move forward, are needed.