



# Bulletin

[sabagov.nl](http://sabagov.nl) - December 2020

## Saba Day celebration 2020



The community on Friday, December 4 celebrated its 45th Saba Day with the raising of the national flag, speeches by dignitaries, song, dance and the recognition of persons with awards. This year's celebrations were special because of the 45th anniversary of the national day and the 35th anniversary of the national flag and the coat of arms. But it was also a different celebration without the presence of visitors from the sister islands. And, it was a celebration to be grateful and to reflect on the past year which was marked by the coronavirus pandemic. "We will reflect upon and remember this year as one of uncertainty, change, fear, heartbreak and, for most of us, very challenging. Our norms, many of our traditions, and even our ideologies have been drastically impacted because of this pandemic,"

said Commissioner Bruce Zagers in his address during the official part. The pandemic has not only had adverse consequences, he said. "It has allowed us to re-ignite our passion for family and for our island. During our lockdown, families started doing things together again. Families were cooking and baking together, they took walks. It allowed our people to appreciate more of the simple things in life like hiking, enjoying our beautiful nature. We have become more appreciative of what we have." Zagers called on the people to not only celebrate Saba on the first Friday of December, but to do so every day. "We should not only feel patriotic, feel proud of our island and heritage on this national day. Let the life lesson from this year be that we celebrate, that we appreciate and that we honor our beloved Saba, our family and our heritage not just one day per year but 365 days per year." Zagers asked people to make an oath to Saba: just as she has and will always be here for us, we will always be here for her. This oath should not only be in words, but also in deeds. Being here for Saba means that if we want to see our island and our people prosper, we will need to do this together with tangible actions. It means less talking and more doing." Commissioner Rolando Wilson reflected on the Saba Day theme. "Lessons that we have learned as a people from our ancestors, and grandparents are that we can achieve anything through faith, the courage to work hard, ambition and the will to push on. We have learnt that we cannot work alone." Saba Day started out as a vision of a young man, William "Will" Johnson who since 1968 appealed to

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authorities to establish a national day. When he became commissioner in 1975, Saba Day became a fact. In 1985, the Executive Council appointed a committee, headed by Will Johnson, to come up with a design for the flag, a national coat of arms and a national song. People were asked to submit designs for the flag. The main colors were to be red, white and blue. There were over 130 designs, which was selected down to 32 then to two. The winner was Ed Johnson. The coat of arms was



designed by George Seaman, while the anthem was written and composed by Dominican nun Christina Maria Jeurissen in 1960. “On our national day, we should give extra thanks and praise. We have a lot to be thankful for: the many rain showers to fill our cisterns, water our plants and nourish our animals, of having been spared from hurricanes this year. We are thankful for the financial assistance of the Dutch ministries during the pandemic. We must give thanks



for the lessons we have learned in the past and take the necessary actions now to be better prepared for the future. As a small island we need each other, and we need to build each other up,” said Wilson. A number of persons were recognized for their valuable contributions. Jenee Lovelace Matthew, youngsters Kristin Zagers and David Dacosta, Carol Toppin, Eric Cornet, Body, Mind and Spirit, Joanne Simmons, Camille Fahey-Blackman, Piet Gerritsen and the Outbreak Management Team received an award.



## Successful Rights of the Child Week



This year's Children's Right Week was held from November 16 to 21, coordinated by the Community Development Department and facilitated in collaboration with many stakeholders: Public Health Department, Youth and Family Affairs (JGCN), Body, Mind and Spirit (BMS), Police Department, Fire Department, the hospital, Mental Health Care, the After-School Care Organization, Laura Linzey Daycare, Child Focus, EC2, Sacred Heart School and Saba Comprehensive School (SCS). This year's activities catered to children and youngsters from daycare to high school, as well as their parents. The week-long activities' objective was to bring awareness to the importance of children's rights on Saba and advocate to uphold these rights. This year's theme was "Investing in our future means investing in our children."

On November 16, the week of events kicked off with assemblies at both the primary and secondary schools. There was a special message to parents and professionals on the children's rights. The Sacred Heart School participated in a sip and paint party for K1 and K2 and a drawing competition. During the week, many stakeholders hosted events such as a scavenger hunt, kids movie night and, most notably, the Children's Rights Expo. Special highlights included the UNICEF Rights of the Child Inter-Island debate with the participation of SCS students, the Children's Parade and the UNICEF Film Festival. The celebration of International Children Day on November 20 with the first annual Children's Parade in particular drew a large crowd. Child Rights Coordinator Alisia Wilson thanked everyone for contributing to make the week a success. Commissioner Rolando Wilson was elated to see such a successful week of activities with a high turn-out of children and parents. He congratulated Alisia Wilson for a job well-done.

## New, adapted bathroom



Through the Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sports (VWS) and the Community Development Department of the Public Entity Saba, received funding to provide assistance to disabled persons in the community. One of the first persons to receive assistance was Janice Massiah in St. John's. Her bathroom was reconstructed to fit the needs of wheelchair-bound person. The works were prepared and supervised by the Planning Bureau. "We are very grateful to the Ministry of VWS. With this grant, we can assist other persons who require adapted facilities due to their disability," said Commissioner Rolando Wilson.

## Harbor project update



The new harbor project at Black Rocks is progressing, be it with some delay, mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. An update by harbor project manager Ton van der Plas. Geotron drilling company has completed the soil testing, both on land and in the sea at the new location. The same company had also done the soil investigation at the initial location at Fort Bay. Geotron carried out drillings in order to make geotechnical calculations. In total, some 20 bore holes were made, some of them on land, the most in the sea. This information will also be used for the environmental impact assessment. The soil samples have gone to the Netherlands for testing. Testing is necessary to determine the soil strength and the physical and chemical composition. The first results are expected in December. A first assessment showed that there are large boulders close to the surface. However, further down into the sea bed, the soil mainly consists of smaller rocks, pebbles and sand. This is a positive factor for the harbor development as it gives more options for the engineering and construction of the quays and breakwater. Geotron also carried out tests at the construction road, to check the foundation of the dirt road that was built to access the Black Rocks construction site. New wave models need to be created now that the harbor project location has moved to Black Rocks. The University of Ghent in Belgium was selected after a tender. The same university carried out the physical model tests at the original location. Three laboratories were invited to make a bid and the one of the University of Ghent had the best price. The model is being constructed and the wave tests are planned to start early December. Two different tests will be carried

out: the vertical wall test, also known as the cofferdam, and the rock breakwater test which makes use of a rock slope. The test results are expected in the first quarter of 2021. The Saba Conservation Foundation (SCF) recently completed the comprehensive coral survey at the new harbor site. SCF did a terrestrial survey late November on the request of Ecovision, the environmental consultant from Curaçao, to make an inventory of the on-land natural habitat. During the maritime survey, a number of coral colonies containing endangered, protected species were identified. These coral colonies will be relocated to an area outside the harbor site. Three potential locations have been indicated. An assessment will be done in December by the SCF to determine the best location for the replanting. The new location looks positive so far, but it is very important to provide a robust coral relocation plan to the responsible authorities in order to obtain permission for the construction. This is a sensible topic which requires time and great care, said Van der Plas, who is hopeful that the tendering for the harbor project can start in the second quarter of 2021.

## COVID-19 relief measures

To help mitigate the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic for Saba entrepreneurs and residents, the Dutch Government and the Public Entity Saba have implemented relief measures since the start of the coronavirus crisis mid-March. The Dutch Government provides a wage subsidy for entrepreneurs to help them cover the costs of their employees, a compensation for dismissed persons, a compensation for self-employed persons, a fixed costs compensation for entrepreneurs, a temporary deferral of tax payments, expanded credit options for entrepreneurs, and the lowering of the electricity and internet tariffs. The Public Entity also implemented measures, including the waiving the business license fee, food packages and other assistance for vulnerable persons and families in need, a one-time relief package for certain groups who lost their income.

## Saba Under Construction



### RoRo ramp completed

In the week of November 4 to 11, the Roll-on, Roll-off (RoRo) ramp at the harbor was completely renovated. The end result is a great improvement to the harbor, said Commissioner Bruce Zagers. The ramp is now much safer. The old ramp had metals sticking out, sharp edges and cracked concrete. During the works, carried out by the young, local contractor Work Monster, the top layer was removed. A new layer was put on top of the ramp and train tracks were installed to

accommodate the vessels and to prevent wear and tear. Work on the ramp started right after the departure of the last cargo boat and was completed on time for the cargo boats to come in exactly one week later. After receiving feedback from the business community, it was decided to shorten the construction period so the works would have less impact on incoming cargo. Working hours were extended to decrease the overall project time.

## Healthy lifestyle project a success



The Healthy Choices, Happy Kids project has turned out to be a great success. Created by the Public Health Department, together with Kemaulee of Fit with Lee, this project took off a few months ago in an effort to foster a healthy lifestyle in the community, in particular the youth. It encourages school children and their parents to partake in various activities that promote healthy eating and physical exercise. The pilot involves grade 2 and 3 at the Sacred Heart Primary School and the Laura Linzey Day Care. In-class movement is encouraged through exercise breaks in between lessons and when teachers notice students' concentration fading. Classes are visited by project leaders to discuss nutrition and healthy eating in an interactive and fun manner, including fruit and vegetable tasting and a visit to Saba Reach's garden. Parents are encouraged to exercise with their kids through Family Fun Fitness at Saba's Fit Park.

### Road widening

The road widening project at St. John's in order to improve safety resumed. A part of the road had already been widened in 2018/2019. The current works are a continuation. Concrete was recently poured in the trenches. The works are part of the overall objective to make Saba's roads safer. The reinforcing of the safety walls is also part of that project.

### Tourist Office renovation

The Tourist Office is being renovated. Added to the building are public restrooms for Windwardside. The interior of the building will get a general facelift and a meeting room will be added. Completion is projected for the first quarter of 2021. The project financing comes from the Netherlands.

### New roof Sunny Valley

The Sunny Valley Center is getting a new, hurricane-proof roof. Having a solid roof on this building is particularly important because it is a hurricane shelter. Works started recently and are expected to be completed in the first quarter of next year. The project is financed by the Dutch government.

# Installation waterpipes to Hell's Gate

## *Water bottling plant being readied*



One of the last parts in the extensive project to install a waterpipe system on Saba is being worked on with the laying of the waterpipes from Windwardside to Hell's Gate. Works to lay the waterpipes are advancing and should be completed by the end of this year. The newest part of the pipeline starts at the big parking lot in Windwardside and ends at the Hell's Gate church. The next and last step in this project to have a pipeline from the reverse

osmosis water plant at Fort Bay to all villages, is the construction of the water filling station near the church. The water filling station in Windwardside has already been completed. With the installation of a pump the water truck can fill up here and supply water to Windwardside and Hell's Gate. Once the water filling station in Hell's Gate is completed in the first part of 2021, trucks can fill up there to supply water on that side of the island. This will further bring down the price of trucking. As a result, the subsidy can be reduced and that money can be used for other projects that benefit the community at large. The Hell's Gate filling station will be the third one. The first filling station in The Bottom became operational in 2018. The processed water from the water plant now comes up to Windwardside in a controlled manner through an ingenious, automated system of cisterns and pump stations at different locations. Works on the water bottling plant continue steadily. The building is completed and the equipment is inside. An expert of Vitens Evides has been working on readying the plant for use. The manufacturer from the United States will then finish the last works and train the personnel that will operate the plant. The plant is expected to become operational in the first quarter of 2021. At the plant, larger, reusable water bottles of 3 and 5 gallons will be filled. The plant will help Saba to be more self-reliant and less dependent on the import of bottled water, and it will also save people a considerable amount money because the large reusable/refillable bottles are cheaper than buying boxes of water. A third important advantage of the new bottling plant is the higher quality of drinking water. Also, the reusing of large water bottles fits in the policy to reduce single-use plastics, it is good for the environment, helps to promote Saba as a green, sustainable island. The water pipeline and water bottling plant projects are funded by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management (IenW) and are executed and supervised by the Planning Bureau of the Public Entity Saba, headed by Bobby Zagers.



## Continued investments in agriculture



Investments in the agriculture sector continue with the construction of the Hydroponics Greenhouse, plans for a second greenhouse for the Saba Benevolent Foundation as well as the strengthening the greenhouse at the Sacred Heart School. Home gardening has been increasing since the COVID-19 pandemic. The Hydroponics Greenhouse project at Rendez-Vous took off in September 2019. Funding for this project comes from the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food

Quality (LNV). The excavation works and the foundation for the greenhouse have been completed and the site is now ready to build the structure. In the meantime, all other excavation works have been completed for the hydroponics building and the structure that will house the store room/restroom. The building structures for the greenhouse and the hydroponics are on Saba and are on-site. The process to purchase the silos and water storage tanks has started. The silos will be on Saba by March 2021. The COVID-19 crisis has had a big effect on the progress of the work due to the fact that employees of the contractor, Saba Roads, including the heavy equipment operators, couldn't travel to Saba to get certain works done. Commissioner Rolando Wilson said that all efforts were made to get the project completed in the shortest possible time so that the production of the fresh produce can start. Wilson announced that preparations were made to start the second greenhouse for the senior citizens at the Saba Benevolent Foundation in The Bottom. Through the LIFE Center program, senior citizens are kept active with activities such as gardening. Also, plans have been drafted to strengthen the greenhouse at the primary school. Head of the Agricultural Department Randall Johnson, together with the designated teacher have been working on this. Gardening areas were constructed at the Saba Comprehensive School (SCS) where students and staff enjoy growing fresh produce. Home gardening has become more popular since the pandemic and many residents are taking part in this positive development. Commissioner Wilson said that he has visited several home gardening sites, of persons who started during the crisis and of persons who have been home growing produce for some time. Wilson encouraged everyone to take up home gardening. With the abundant rainfall in the past months, the produce has been great. A large batch of Dutch potatoes were brought to Saba and are being planted. The Garden at the Level has been producing well, and so has the Farm at Hell's Gate. Wilson, who called on people to buy local produce, has visited the Garden and the Farm. "It is good to see that the people doing good work and that they are encouraged by visitors. More people should do so as it is a great incentive for them." It is the intention to sell fresh, local produce under the gazebo in The Bottom in the near future. In the fisheries sector, plans have been announced to start a fish market where local fishermen can have their fish sold. The Saba Fisherman Association has put out a vacancy for a fish market manager. This person will manage the fish market, and will assist the customers, handle and prepare the fish for sales.



## CVQ Early Childhood Education training continues



Manager Tessa Samuel-Alexander. The first group is expected to finish in July 2021. The success of the first group is highly motivating for the second group which should be CVQ 2 ECE certified by the summer of 2022. In total there are 30 students in the CVQ 2 ECE program.

## Single-use plastic ban approved

The Island Council on October 22 unanimously approved the Island Ordinance to ban single-use plastic. The ban will be implemented in phases in order to give businesses time to secure alternatives. The ordinance goes into effect per January 1, 2021 with a ban on plastic carrier bags. Besides carrier bags, the list of single-use plastic products that will be prohibited consists of food containers, cups, plates, cutlery, straws, stirrers, cotton swabs with plastic rods, fresh produce bags and confetti. These products, with the exception of food containers will become prohibited per May 1, 2021. Food containers are the last product to be banned, on October 1, 2021. The Island Council was unanimously positive about the single-use plastic ban, which came to be upon the initiative of the Island Council through a 2018 motion, tabled by Council Member Vito Charles. Single-use plastic products are bad for the environment, cause pollution and result in litter. The single-use plastic ban fits in Saba's vision as a sustainable island where nature and the environment are important.

## Wind energy study

The Public Entity Saba, the Saba Electric Company (SEC) and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy (EZK) have been exploring ways to further expand the share of renewable energy. One of the options is wind energy. For this purpose, Pondera Consult BV was contracted to carry out a feasibility study with the objective to assess the potential of adding more renewable energy to the electricity grid, with focus on wind energy. The results of the study should give a clear answer to the question as to whether wind energy is technically and financially feasible. The feasibility study fits in Saba's ambitions to increase the share of renewable energy. Saba already has two solar parks, both located at the airport, with the installation of a smaller solar park in The Bottom recently completed.



## Mentorship pilot program



The Mentorship pilot program, which started in September, and involves the coaching of youngsters between the ages of 12 and 17 by mentors, is a success. Eleven mentors, all volunteers, and their mentees together work on social skills, they discuss career advice, relationship and communication skills building, and explore new hobbies and interests. The mentor/mentee pair established their goal on which they work. The group is also engaging in community-based volunteer projects for the Christmas period. Mentors receive guidance and support from

coordinators Rayann Ramdin and Carol Skinner. The program's current cycle will end in March. The mentors did a training at the start of the program. The mentorship program is a joint initiative of the Department of Community Development and the Saba Comprehensive School (SCS). The mentor coach the youngsters during an important period of their development: the period in their lives where they form their ideas on relationships, lifestyle, hobbies, and extracurricular activities, and are also more susceptible to peer pressure.

## Second Chamber updated

In a follow-up to a virtual meeting with the Second Chamber's Permanent Committee for Kingdom Relations, the Island Council on October 5 sent a letter to Parliament about the COVID-19 developments. The Council expressed its gratitude for the financial assistance that the Dutch Government has been giving, but pointed out that there are a few bottlenecks that require urgent attention. These bottlenecks relate to the compensation of expenses for entrepreneurs, the detrimental effects of COVID-19 on a small-island economy and the associated increase of poverty. The expenditures compensation for the private sector contributed little to the alleviation for entrepreneurs. The formula of the compensation in the second emergency package excluded many small businesses because their turn-over was too small. The Council referred to the hardship in the tourism sector. With the harbor and airport closed for visitors since the pandemic, hotels, dive operators, taxis, the travel agency and the local ferry have not generated income since March.

## The good and not so good of 10-10-10

Saba has benefited enormously from the direct relationship with the Netherlands, and there have been many improvements since Saba became a public entity on October 10, 2010. However, there are a number of issues that require urgent attention from The Hague, said Commissioner Bruce Zagers. In a letter that he sent to the Second Chamber and State Secretary Raymond Knops early October on the occasion of 10 years new constitutional relations, he drew up a summary of things that have gone good and things that have not gone so well. The Dutch government has made sizeable investments on Saba in the past years. "Our development after 10-10-10 shows that it was the right decision for us," stated Zagers. On the downside, there isn't enough understanding for Saba's specific issues, the lack of structural funding has resulted in a first-time deficit, the high cost of living requires tackling, the rising poverty and a tax system that is too cumbersome.

## CFT advice put aside with good reason

The Public Entity Saba did not follow the advice of the Committee for Financial Supervision with regard to the 2021 budget, and with good reason, according to Finance Commissioner Bruce Zagers. The Island Council approved the skeleton budget on November 12 with a US \$1.3 million deficit in contravention of the CFT had not given the draft budget a positive opinion. Following the advice by the CFT would have a detrimental effect on Saba's liquidity position; essentially reducing the liquidity position to a negative balance by 2023, explained Zagers. In order to arrive at a balanced budget, which is required by law, the CFT advised to remove the loan repayments and to pay these expenses

from government's liquidity. "This advice was given whilst knowing the public entity's fragile liquidity position," stated Zagers, who added that the issue of the fragile liquidity position had been highlighted before by the CFT and especially by Ernst and Young in its audit opinion on the 2019-year report. To further reduce the deficit, the CFT also advised to book the expected loss of income from the COVID-19 crisis to the general reserve. "Booking these expected losses would further weaken our liquidity position especially seeing that the deficit of 2019 was already booked to the general reserve. It is known that the general reserve does not represent cash in hand but that it is in fixed assets and infrastructure which cannot be quickly transferred into cash," said Zagers. Another CFT recommendation to reduce expenses was put aside as well. Zagers clarified in a letter to the CFT that the expenses included in the budget were based on the bare minimum and that these amounts were needed to execute government's legal responsibilities.

## Investing in civil servants

A large group of civil servants of the Public Entity Saba have completed various trainings and received their certificates during a ceremony on September 15. Some 25 civil servants received their First Responder (BHV) certification. During the BVH course, participants learned how to identify and resolve safety issues within buildings and at the job site, and how to act during emergency situations. Last year managers and department heads participated in the extensive Management Development (PEP) trajectory. Participants learned to develop insight into leadership qualities, develop skills for effective communication, gain insight into how leaders inspire others, and how to achieve management goals. Department heads have received the 'Managers Toolkit' from departing Human Resource (HR) Manager Miguela Gumbs, who compiled the comprehensive manual. The Public Entity continues developing its personnel, and to further promote professional development within government, civil servants could purchase an all-inclusive laptop package.

## Civil servants take oath

Twenty persons were sworn in as civil servants of the Public Entity Saba during an official ceremony at the Government Administration Building on July 9. The so-called oath of office, per article 41 of the law that regulates the position of civil servants is a promise that a civil servant makes, to uphold the rules and regulations of government. Island Governor Jonathan Johnson addressed the gathering with an explanation of what being a civil servant means to government. He used the comparison of a well-working car: everyone is a different part all working together, and that is what makes the car work. After Johnson's short address, the civil servants took the oath of office, they signed their certificates as proof.