

NEWSLETTER

BELIZE ASSOCIATION OF PLANNERS



"Making Belize Sustainable"

A Corona Easter to Remember

by Deseree Arzu



Picture Courtesy Melonie Staine

There are two holidays, undoubtedly, on which Belizeans will expend their energies and financial resources - Christmas and Easter! Whether they have to, as Kruffy would say, 'beg, baro, er tief' (beg, borrow, or steal), Belizeans will do whatever it takes to ensure that they and their families have memorable Christmas and Easter breaks. And, for many, their preparations for both holidays begin immediately after they've celebrated the year before.

But, for most, if not ALL of us, the Easter of 2020, will be one to remember - not because of how much preparations we put into it and the great memories we created - but because of the restrictions that were implemented due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This resulted in cancelled trips, disgruntled businesses, frustrated consumers; disappointed children, and angry consumers. Most every plan that we may have made leading up to the weekend of April 14, 2020 - Easter Sunday - had to be called off. One of the most disappointing cancellations was the Annual Holy Saturday Cross Country Cycling Classic. During this event, Belizeans would rally, as a people - routing and cheering - hoping that a homegrown cyclist would bring home the garland. However, this did not happen in 2020! Churches cancelled Easter Sunday in-person services, which meant that congregations had to attend them virtually. Even the popular Horse Race in Burrell Boom, was called off due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

It was on the 23rd and 25th of March that Belize recorded its first and second positive cases of COVID-19. Shortly after, the Governor General declared a State of Emergency for San Pedro, Ambergris Caye. The first case was a resident of the island, who had recently returned from the United States; Los Angeles to be precise, but failed

to self-quarantine. She is said to have travelled to San Ignacio, where her mother, the second victim lived, and subsequently had been infected, by her daughter. San Pedro is one of the popular local destinations where Belizeans spend Easter annually, so when Government announced that they would extend the SoE from 72-hours to one month, just weeks before the Easter holidays, the level of disappointment for many increased.

As infections spread, the Governor General, on the advice of Cabinet, extended the State of Emergency, to the entire country on April 1. We closed our international airport and borders with Guatemala and Mexico. This meant that those who would normally travel to the nearby Mexican cities of Chetumal, Cancun, or Playa del Carmen, had to request reimbursements from hotels; or simply cancel those plans. Hotels closed, which meant that pools were off-limit. The entire tourism industry, Belize's number one foreign exchange earner, had crashed. The Belize Tourism Board announced layoffs of half of its staff; with the remainder dismissed a week later.

Additionally, the Prime Minister and Attorney General announced the implementation of social-distancing measures, a curfew, and added restrictions on travel and any gathering at rivers and 'cool spots'. Many people lost their jobs, or received pay cuts. Some folks are still without jobs.

To complicate an already tense situation, when folks turned to buying their personal swimming pool, in an effort to recreate their version of a 'Happy Easter', the popular store they depended on sold out on swimming pools in the blink of an eye, leaving many without limited options, especially for the children. *(Continued on Page 2)*

INTRODUCING: CARIANNE JOHNSON - DIRECTOR RESEARCH AND UNIVERSITY PROTOCOL, BAP



Carianne Johnson is a 39-year-old Project Manager with the Caribbean Community Climate Change Center, also known as 5 C's. However, in her spare time, she volunteers with the Belize Association of Planners, BAP, as the organization's Director of Research and University Protocol.

Her friends and family were not surprised when they found that she was volunteering with BAP because, as Carianne expresses, they already knew she enjoyed "volunteering her time." Carianne believes that volunteering is a necessary service to communities. She acknowledges that, "Members of BAP have the same commitment to the communities of Belize."

It is because of her presence in the Caribbean Urban Forum, as a member of the Trinidad and Tobago Society of Planners that she learned of BAP; and after moving to Belize, she decided to become involved with its work. "I knew that joining BAP was necessary to support the work of the organization in the country," Carianne says. She is confident that, within the next few years, "BAP will grow and be engaged in more programs."

Despite wanting to volunteer more time to BAP, and finding it a challenge to learn of the work and not being able to devote more time, Carianne recognizes that "Volunteering builds character and makes for a well-rounded professional." Her hope is that young people would recognize this and decide to volunteer their skills to BAP, too.

She wishes that people knew of the many projects and support with which BAP is involved. "BAP has great interest in community work and provides support to national organizations without any priority for financial gain," she explains.

She says that even though she was not always a planner, and it is her second career path (her first being a Youth Counselor), Carianne encourages interested individuals to become a part of BAP. "It would be a rewarding experience, you will learn interesting things about Belize," she says.

A Corona Easter to Remember *(Continued from Page 1)*

The pandemic has taught us so much. A friend of mine says he has learned to value family even more than before; and to enjoy the things that are "right next to you," such as your own home, and your own backyard. Another individual expressed how much he missed his extended family and Belize, since it was normal for him and his immediate family to travel, annually, to enjoy the sun, sea and sand back home. A third person tells me that she did not miss anything about 2020 Easter, because she would usually spend it at home, anyway.

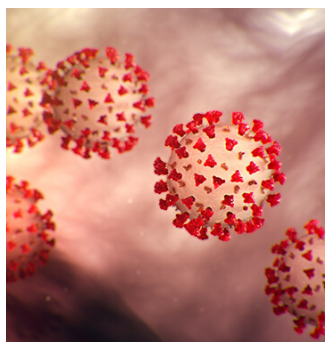
One thing is certain, most everyone, if asked, will admit that Easter 2020 will be etch in memory forever. For many, they will remember it as the first time they were unable to 'celebrate' the way Belizeans celebrate Easter each year. We will remember it as the first time in the 70-plus year history of the Cross Country Cycling Classic that there was not a race on Holy Saturday. It is definitely a Corona Easter to remember!



MISSION – To address relevant planning and development issues in Belize by working in partnership with the public and private sector and civil society organizations, and the people of Belize through research, education, advocacy and action.

FOR UPDATES ON COVID-19

Contact Ministry of Health - Belmopan



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VISION – BAP is a proactive professional planning organization committed to assuring social justice and promoting sustainability in the natural and built environment.

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