

The people's time to clean up our doorstep

BY FELICITY INGRAHAM

I REMEMBER when I spent a few months in Virginia and my friends were all excited to go to the beach. Virginia Beach is the spot, according to them, and it was a big deal for them. They were preparing to drive from Richmond fully outfitted with towels and beach gear. I decided I'd stay home, because where I come from, we have some of the most beautiful beaches in the world - so I wasn't missing out on beaching. When they returned with their photos, I couldn't believe it. The greys and browns shocked me. Beaches in The Bahamas are lovely shades of blues and white, sandy beaches. Oh, how we take our beaches for granted.

When I returned home to New Providence, I totally appreciated my country a thousand times more. The sun was shining in America, but I would look at it and wonder where the warmth was. It just wasn't the same. If you haven't travelled much, you may think "sun, sand and sea" is just a cliché. But if you leave The Bahamas for any significant amount of time and live in a northern country, you'll be begging for home sweet home. You will then understand why millions of tourists flock to our beaches every year. It's a sweet escape from the greys of the city. The colours of the water alone are enough to inspire great writers, artists and the like.

It's obvious many Bahamians take the beaches for granted. I spent my Sunday visiting Bonefish Pond with a friend. The pristine environment was so refreshing. I saw a couple of puffer fish with intricate patterns, some grunts and sergeant majors and a few sea cucumbers. The air was clean and you could see nothing but mangroves for miles. The birds were adorable. But as I sat on the bench, I noticed plastic bags and Styrofoam containers stuck in the mangroves. It was very disheartening. People still won't tote their garbage behind them and they are doing a grave injustice to our environment.

If you travel the world, you would appreciate this country more. I don't even see this type of littering and dumping in other parts of the world where beaches exist. This type of nasty behaviour may exist elsewhere, but it's no excuse for

Bahamians making a mess of their own home. It seems if nothing else, people around the world try to hold on to whatever natural resources they have. They understand that if they don't make an effort to preserve it, it won't be around for future generations.

The Bahamas government, environmental organisations, youth groups - so many institutions have taken on the charge to clean up the beaches and educate Bahamians about the importance of preserving our beaches. Remember the "Clean, Green, Pristine" campaign? Well, we were all enthused for a while, but once the ads stopped consistently running, it seems beachgoers simply forgot the rules. The Bahamas Public Parks and Beaches Authority has been doing an awesome job of cleaning up, but I don't think the workers can keep up with the amount of refuse dumped on our shorelines every weekend. BREEF does a great job also, and funding and manpower are out into educating Bahamians and saving the environment. The Bahamas National Trust has been holding the fort for ages, yet people still use the beautiful sea and beach for a dump.

Do people not get that plastic suffocates the fish, turtles and other marine life? How hard is it to place your garbage in the back trunk until you find

an appropriate container? How much would it take out of you to discourage a friend from dropping their fast food junk on the ground? The only way for this to work is for every citizen to take a personal responsibility to ensure that they don't litter the beaches and parks. We must set an example for the children to follow.

I left Bonefish Pond to do a little travelling around the island to see just how pervasive this problem is. I came face to face with the reality - as beautiful as the beaches in New Providence are, there are lots of nasty beach-goers. Even the night sneakers who have sex on the beach - don't leave your condom on the beach either. The tide comes in, and takes that plastic sheath out to sea, and the little fish can swim right in and suffocate, or a bigger fish may swallow it whole.

I also had some issue with the fact that so many wonderful shorelines are on private property. I feel that there should be more areas for public beaching. However, Bahamians must do a better job at protecting the little that is available in order to make a case for more access.

The Tribune's Grand Bahama reporter Denise Maycock wrote a piece around this time last year, noting that beach litter was a "big concern" on the island.

She wrote: "During a visit at Taino Beach last week, rubbish and garbage bags full of trash were strewn about around beach park grounds. Trash receptacles were overflowing and the children's playground was filthy and littered with trash."

The Family Islands are in far better condition than New Providence. There are still scores of beaches practically untouched and in pure pristine condition. However, the trash problem is obviously spreading and for this reason, this column seeks to put the spotlight on it right before the Easter



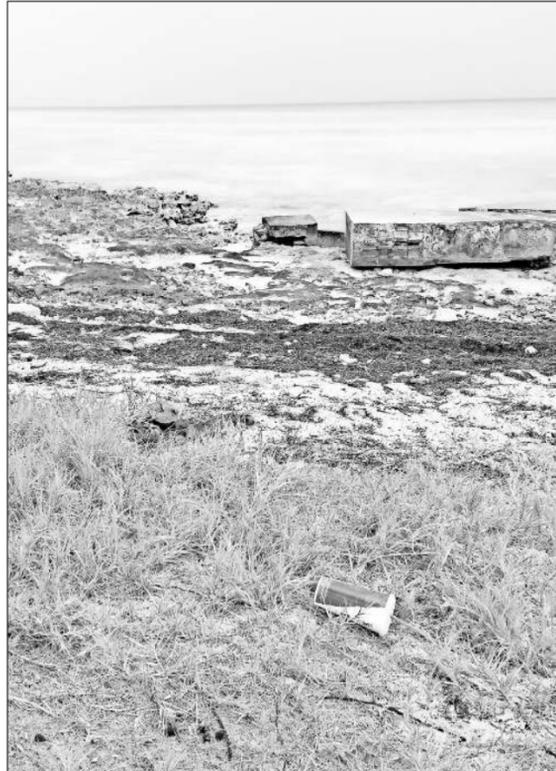
STOKE'S CABANA BEACH, East New Providence

Monday holiday. Traditionally, it's the first day that Bahamians go in the water for the year. After Easter Monday, the beaches in New Providence tend to look deplorable. From this holiday on, families flock to the beach every weekend. It's time to establish a new culture. If your home and lawn is not strewn with garbage, don't do it to our national front lawn - the beach.

In late September 2016, the Eleutheran newspaper reported that a massive cleanup performed by the island's kids took place at Northside Beach, Rock Sound. There, 1,080 pounds of litter were collected in less than a mile. Items such as "syringes, fishing gear, straws, plastic food wrappers, plastic bottles and caps, foam containers, and plastic fragments were collected from the beach".

This was a part of an international campaign led by the Ocean Conservancy, which hosted the International Coastal Cleanup Day on September 17. Through this effort, in one year more than 18 million pounds of trash was collected by nearly 800,000 volunteers worldwide.

In Exuma at the departure lounge in the airport, there is a beautiful ocean scene near the security booth that was created by kids. It was made with hundreds of bottle covers. While admiring it, I discussed the piece with a native who explained that the piece was created after a coastal clean up. The kids used the covers of all the bottles they collected to



create this piece. It spoke volumes.

Recently, Minister of Agriculture and Marine Resources Renward Wells heralded the coming of the "blue economy". He pointed out that as the world begins to turn its attention towards the oceans and the

vast source of wealth they hold, places like The Bahamas would become critical players in the new industry and that the country could position itself to be a world leader. In order for this to happen, we had better clean up our doorstep before the guests arrive.



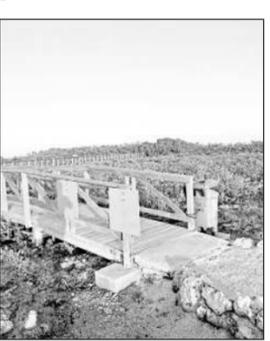
A SEAGULL looking at a plastic bag on Montagu Beach.



GOODMAN'S BAY



THE EASTERN ROAD



THE PEOPLE'S RESPONSE TO BLACKLISTING ACTION:

THE news that the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Financial Services were heading to Europe to plead the Bahamas' case against being "blacklisted" by the EU, prompted a lively reaction from readers on tribune242.com.

Spotier said: "Take back our natural resources from the elites and put it in the hands of the people and we will be all right regardless of any blacklist that the EU put on us."

Prompting Dawes to ask: "Outside of the aragonite what natural resources do we have over here? And how much would we get if we had control of the aragonite?"

DEDDIE had this to say: "Stop jumping through hoops. Let them do what



they have to do. What is so ridiculous, they themselves can't meet their own criteria. If they were honest they would blacklist themselves."

TigerB said: "Guys don't forget, that blacklisting will affect all Bahamians, no matter what colour of shirt dey does wear, maybe we should hope for the best . . . maybe."

On Monday, *The Tribune* also reported that the Minnis administration is considering acquiring a building in Palmetto Point, Eleuthera to

house a clinic - which means \$535,348.77 paid to Carey's Construction for work on a new clinic under the previous government will be wasted.

Joeblow criticised the Minister of Health: "Sands has been itching to be in this position for years. He finally has it and the only thing he seems to be able to do is expose the failings of the former administration. As a doctor who has been in the system for years and has been shadow Minister of Health he should have had a much better grasp of the challenges in health, should have formulated a workable plan that would have delivered results to the Bahamian people by now. No such luck."

And there was this from

Stillwaters: "I am getting so tired of the FNM just digging up the PLP's corruption. We know all this . . . and more that is still being hidden . . . we know there was widespread corruption, but it's time for the FNM to go start doing it's JOB. Don't get me wrong . . . I don't want to see, hear, or smell the PLP ever again . . . but go do your damn job!!!!!"

In *The Tribune's* latest online poll, we asked readers if they were in favour of Oban Energy's proposed oil refinery in Grand Bahama.

At the time of going to press, 57 percent said they supported the refinery plans. The poll is still open, so don't miss your chance to vote and have your say on tribune242.com.



BONEFISH POND