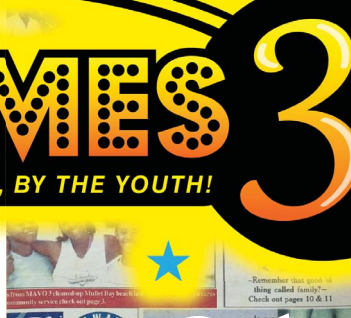


TEENTIMES 30

FOR THE YOUTH, BY THE YOUTH!



CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT



The Entrepreneur Informative Session

BY DRISHTI AND ADITI



The entrepreneur informative session, hosted by the Rotary Club of St. Martin Sunrise, brought together aspiring and experienced business pro-

professionals Vincentia Rosen-Standiford, Jean Th. Arnell, Tamara Leonard and Edsel Gumbs. The event featured four speakers who shared valuable insights on business growth, technology, and innovation. It began with an introduction by Rotarian Valda-Hazel, who explained the role of the Bureau for Intellectual Property (BIP) of Saint Martin. She mentioned how the bureau protects trademarks, copyrights, and patents without taking any litigating stance.

First speaker: Vincentia Rosen-Sandiford
BIP SXM director, Vincentia Rosen-Sandiford, spoke on the importance of IP in helping innovation and entrepreneurship. The guest speaker talked about how IP protection, such as patents, trademarks, and copyrights, provides creators authority over their work, while adding that the youth is the econ-

omy's future. She also went in-depth to explain how to get a patent, and what they are – this also applies to trademarks and copyrights. Mrs. Vincentia Rosen-Sandiford also touched on the CIPA, the sub-brand created in 2019 to improve Sint Maarten's intellectual property protection.

Second Speaker: Jean Th. Arnell
Jean Th. Arnell, entrepreneur and expert in technological innovation, delivered key messages with regard to the technology at the forefront of modern entrepreneurship. According to him, it is for this reason that most businesses rely heavily on knowledge and innovations rather than the availability of material resources. Arnell then continued explaining the effects artificial intelligence (AI) has to date, including using AI-created presentations that have

normally taken several days to develop within minutes. However, he emphasized that AI should enhance human intelligence, not replace it. Arnell further stressed the importance of staying updated with technology and learning day-in and day-out. As clear as crystal, his message was that entrepreneurs must move forward with innovation, adapting responsibly to the rapidly changing business landscape.

Third Speaker: Tamara Leonard
Tamara Leonard, a God-fearing, former Member of Sint Maarten's Parliament, was on hand to share her encouraging story of how she became an entrepreneur in children's book authorship. It was while fighting cancer that she found the time to express her creativity and inspire the minds of youngsters. In her talk, Tamara indicated how much dedica-

tion is required to turn an entrepreneurial dream into reality, with recognition of the financial risks one must take when starting up a business. She also spoke on ethical decision-making, especially with AI at this time. Among the key things learned from her presentation was that communication plays a vital role in business. Tamara stressed that any kind of venture is at risk without proper communication with either the customers or partners. She outlined a simple roadmap for success: Identify your idea; research; create a business plan; gather feedback; launch. Her message was clear – embrace challenges, learn from setbacks, and enjoy the entrepreneurial journey.

Fourth speaker: Edsel Gumbs
The last and fourth speaker, Edsel Gumbs, discussed

how developing a complete plan is crucial to managing a company from its beginnings to its growth and development. The speaker also discussed the reasons for the failure of many firms – these include typical mistakes like poor financial management, a lack of market research, and a failure to adapt to the growing needs of customers. Successful businesses are based on a foundation of setup, toughness, and ongoing learning. The speaker spoke about the need to have clear goals, strong leadership skills, and knowledge of market trends, as well as how important it is to be aware of marketing tactics, pointing out that companies that don't market well often struggle to stay in business.



TEENTIMES
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is a publication of

The Daily Herald

Founder
Michael R. Granger

Coordinator
Rochelayne Rommy-Richardson

Team Leader
Makayla Cooks

Content Coordinator
Lehar Marata

Writers/Members
Shiloh Williams
Jahzara Payne
Asante Phillips
Alisah Kirtan
Arti Bulland
Aditi Rajpal
Aditi Ramchandani
Makayla Cooks
Suhani Nathumal
April Titre
Suraj Vaswani
Dishita Babani
Drishiti Babani
Melany Ellis
Sanya Jandial
Zhuoyi Su
Christopher Rogers

Contributors Abroad
Saheli Kirpalani
Lavina Ramchandani
Haifa Forde
Bishaka Khatri
Lavisha Dadlani
Diya Rajpal
Chirag Ramchandani
Rohan Goswami

Graphic Designer
Evdaney "Eve" Henriques

Contact:
teentimesxm@gmail.com

Teen Times: A Legacy of Empowering St. Maarten's Youth for 30 Years

As 2025 comes into view, an institution on St. Maarten is marking an extraordinary milestone: *Teen Times* – the North-Eastern Caribbean's only full-coloured news magazine for and by young people – is marking its 30th anniversary. For three decades, *Teen Times* has transcended its role as a youth publication to become a dynamic, influential, and indispensable youth group that has shaped the island's community and beyond.



Founded in 1995 in the aftermath of Hurricane Luis by Michael Granger and the late Roger Snow, Publisher of *The Daily Herald*, *Teen Times* is far more than a collection of articles. It is a platform, a movement, and a testament to the power of perseverance and belief in the potential of young people. From a youth supplement of St. Maarten's largest daily newspaper, *The Daily Herald*, *Teen Times* has evolved into one of the island's most active and impactful organizations.

At its core lies a simple yet powerful mantra championed by its founder: "Real, significant change in any country is influenced and led by young people." Over the years, Granger has not only espoused this belief, but turned it into a reality by placing vocal and driven youth at the forefront of critical societal issues. Today, *Teen Times* stands tall as a paragon of what a youth group can and should be – a force of inspiration that empowers young people to enact positive change while fostering values of responsibility, leadership and service.

Imagine, *Teen Times* started in a time of no social media. It was also the first print publication on St. Maarten with a website – yes, even before is "mother" paper *The Daily Herald* – and *Teen Times* is still here.

A legacy of impact through generations

Thirty years is no small feat for any entity, let alone one reliant on the ever-changing, passionate spirit of youth. *Teen Times* has not only survived, but has thrived across generations, adapting and expanding its reach to remain a cornerstone of

the community. Hundreds of young people have walked through its doors over the years, carrying with them the lessons and experiences they gained into their adult lives.

The impact of *Teen Times* alumni is evident. Former members have gone on to become Members of Parliament, Government Ministers, doctors, teachers, lawyers, and leaders in major global corporations such as Microsoft. And, yes, many more have chosen the field of communications as a career choice. Their success is a direct reflection of the foundation laid by *Teen Times*, which instills a sense of purpose, discipline, and civic duty in its members.

Granger's vision has been pivotal to this success. His dedication to the group has been unwavering, giving his life to guiding the youth of St. Maarten. Alongside him for almost two decades is the equally dedicated Rochelayne "Roosje" Rommy-Richardson, *Teen Times*' current coordinator. Together, they form a dynamic leadership team, mentoring and inspiring new generations of youth to be responsible citizens and role models for their peers.

Empowering youth to lead

What sets *Teen Times* apart is its ability to give young people a voice – and not just a voice, but also a platform through which their concerns, aspirations and ideas can resonate across the island and beyond. Through the power of the pen and community engagement, *Teen Times* has become a force for advocacy and positive change.

The group's influence extends

far beyond its monthly publication. Over 5,000 articles written by youth have graced the pages of *Teen Times*, addressing issues ranging from youth delinquency to the environment, performing arts, education reform, and social justice. These young writers are unafraid to speak out on matters of importance – a trait they undoubtedly inherited from their vocal and passionate leadership.

Besides producing a publication for the youth and by the youth, Teen Times' other activities include the following:

- Hosting Prom Night for high school seniors.
- Organizing Talent Showdown, the island's biggest performing arts competition.
- Hosting its annual Toy and School Supply Drive for the less fortunate during Christmas time.
- Opening bank saving accounts for talented youth.
- Awarding 15 performing arts scholarships of US \$2,500 each.
- Donating laptops to high schools.
- Donating school supplies to elementary schools.
- Taking 25 talented youth to New York to perform at the Apollo and Alvin Ailey. They were the first St. Maarten students to perform LIVE in front of millions when they appeared on BET.
- Volunteering at more than 60 events.
- Winning multiple youth and community awards.

Some of Teen Times' most notable advocacy initiatives include the following:

- The Period Poverty Project: Advocating for free sanitary hygiene products in public spaces, including schools.
- St. Maarten History in Schools: Successfully pushing for the inclusion of local history in secondary school curriculums.
- Youth Delinquency White Paper: Presenting actionable solutions to

tackle youth delinquency on the island.

- Renewable Energy Advocacy: Launching a school-based initiative focused on solar energy and renewable approaches.

- Hair Discrimination Prevention Act: Pioneering a parliamentary initiative to combat discrimination based on natural hairstyles, now moving toward legislation.

A culture of excellence and accountability

Teen Times operates with a clear set of rules and expectations that reflects its high standards. Members are required to maintain good grades, and participation in the group is contingent upon academic performance. Deadlines are sacrosanct, assignments are non-negotiable, and social media behaviour is monitored to ensure members are positive role models.

This structure has cultivated a culture of excellence, instilling discipline and a sense of responsibility in its members. *Teen Times* is not just a "cool" organization; it's a proving ground for tomorrow's leaders. The group is also proud of its multi-cultural make-up, with its members representing the melting pot that is St. Maarten. The members of *Teen Times* have no qualms announcing to the world: "We are united in our diversity."

Looking ahead: Celebrating 30 years of excellence

As *Teen Times* celebrates its 30th anniversary, the group is preparing to honour its legacy in grand style. Though the official anniversary is on January 29, a major reunion is planned for the month of June, bringing together past and present members to celebrate three decades of excellence, impact, and service. Throughout the remainder of the school year, the publication will also highlight historical moments, showcasing the journey and achievements of this remarkable organization.

Teen Times' story is one of resilience, passion, and unwavering belief in the potential of young people. It is a shining example of what can be achieved when youth are empowered to lead, given a platform to speak, and guided by dedicated mentors like Michael Granger and Rochelayne Rommy-Richardson.

As St. Maarten looks to the future, *Teen Times* reminds us all of a timeless truth: Significant change begins with the youth – and with *Teen Times* leading the charge, the island's future is in good hands.

Here's to 30 years of *Teen Times* – and to many more years of empowering, inspiring and leading St. Maarten's youth!

First 2 issues of Teen Times



Snowflakes and Surprises

International students' first winter abroad

BY SUHANI NATHUMAL

As kids, the “this or that” game was a staple of our imagination, prompting us to choose between two dream scenarios. One of the hardest decisions for me was always the classic “Winter or Summer” question. I’d sit there, weighing my options carefully: The warmth of summer days; or the magic of winter wonderlands? Despite never having experienced winter, I always picked it, for one simple reason – snow!

The idea of snow was captivating, a novelty that seemed worth everything else. However, as I grew older and began preparing for life as an International student, I started hearing stories from friends who had already experienced their first winter abroad. Their stories of freezing mornings, slippery sidewalks, endless layers of clothing, and gloomy skies made me pause and wonder if the charm of snow was really enough to outweigh the challenges.

Was winter truly the winter I’d always imagined it to be? With this doubt, I decided to speak with a few International students about their first winters abroad – their expectations, surprises, tips, and what they wished they had known before facing the cold. From magical moments of seeing snow for the first time, to frozen realities of frostbites, here’s what they had to say about their first winter.

AKARSH BHATIA

Akarsh is a first year law student at the University of Tilburg in Holland.

Expectations and first impressions

Before experiencing winter for the first time, I thought it would be a lot colder and worse than it actually was. While it was still cold, it wasn’t as unbearable as I had imagined. My first reaction to snow was pure awe; it looked really beautiful from my window – almost like a perfect postcard scene.

Adaptation and challenges

Preparing for my first winter wasn’t too complicated; I just bought the basic necessities such as a puffer jacket and gloves. Surprisingly, I didn’t find it difficult to adjust to the season. The only real challenge I faced was the rain – but even that wasn’t unexpected, and was just something I had to deal with.

Experiences and fun facts

One of my most memorable experiences during winter was going ice skating with my friends. I gave it a



try, but since I wasn’t very good at it, I don’t think I’d do it again. As for winter itself, I found it surprisingly similar to a slightly colder version of autumn, which was something I hadn’t expected.

Tips and advice

For anyone experiencing winter for the first time, my biggest tip would be to stick to your routine so the gloomy weather doesn’t demotivate you. On a practical note, I’d also recommend always carrying gloves in your bag, just in case. Personally, staying warm isn’t too complicated for me, all I need is my jacket, though I know many people, like my friends, who like to layer up to stay cosy.

Personal reflections

Winter here is the complete opposite of the climate in St. Maarten, so it definitely took some getting used to. With that said, I didn’t find it particularly hard to adapt. I haven’t really noticed any major cultural differences in how people embrace winter, but now that I’ve experienced it, I can say that I do like it. Then again, it’s all I’ve experienced so far, so there’s still more to discover.

RIYA DAYALANI

Riya is a first year student at the University of Maastricht. She is currently working towards a bachelor’s degree in liberal arts and sciences.

Expectations and first impressions

Before experiencing winter for the first time, I didn’t expect it to be too bad. Based on the experiences of others, I knew it was going to be cold, but I failed to understand its extremity. My experience ended up being extremely different from what I had imagined. Winter was not only colder than I expected, it was also incredibly gloomy and even a bit depressing at times. My first reaction to snow, though, was pure joy. On the days when snow covered everything, it felt magical and uplifting. But without the snow, the gloomy atmosphere made winter feel heavy.

Adaptation and challenges

My preparations for my first winter abroad did not start while I was in St. Maarten. Once I arrived in the Netherlands, however, I began buying winter essentials like thermals, thicker socks, scarves, earmuffs, and a completely new wardrobe filled with

jeans, sweaters, and hoodies. A proper winter jacket was by far the most important purchase, as it’s essential for staying warm. I also realized how crucial it was to have good winter boots, as regular shoes quickly became wet and muddy, making them unpleasant and impractical to wear in the snow.

The hardest thing to adjust to was the weather itself. Coming from the Caribbean, I found the cold, gloomy and depressing atmosphere difficult to cope with. I often felt unmotivated to go outside. On top of that, I faced unexpected challenges with transportation. Snow days would sometimes lead to buses being cancelled, and riding my bike in snowy conditions was nearly impossible, making it a real struggle to get to school during the winter.

Experiences and fun facts

The most memorable moment of my first winter was the first time I saw snow. It was a magical experience that left a lasting impression. I also tried ice-skating for the first time, which turned out to be incredibly fun and something I’d love to do again. One surprising thing I learned about winter is that you don’t have to stay indoors just because it’s cold.

It’s important to go out and make the most of the season. For example, my friends and I had many fun activities, such as movie nights. I also realized just how essential it is to dress warmly and layer up properly – something I hadn’t given much thought to before. Staying covered really makes all the difference in enjoying the winter.

Tips and advice

For someone experiencing winter for the first time, I’d recommend doing some research beforehand, especially if you’re into styling yourself and still want to stay warm. Watch videos on layering and how to look stylish while staying cosy, so you know what’s worth investing in and what isn’t. Also, take time to research before buying a winter jacket. It’s essential to get one that’s not only warm but also durable and long-lasting.

Looking back, I wish I had known more about preparing for winter before it started. I started buying my winter clothes in November and thought I was prepared. I even bought a full winter jacket, thinking that would be enough, but I quickly realized I was wrong. Layering and having additional items like thermals

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and proper footwear are just as important.

To stay warm and cosy during freezing temperatures, I've found that using an electric blanket or a portable heater makes a big difference.

Personal reflections

Winter here is completely different from the climate back in St. Maarten. In St. Maarten, the weather is consistent all year round; in Holland, it was a drastic change for me. Adjusting to the cold and gloomy environment was a big shift from the sunny and warm climate I was used to.

Now that I've experienced winter, I have mixed feelings about it. There were parts I enjoyed and others I didn't. I disliked the days when it was extremely cold with no sun, as it made going outside feel discouraging. On the other hand, I enjoyed the snow days and found that, over time, I adapted to the cold, which made it more bearable. Winter has its challenges, but it also has moments that can be enjoyable.

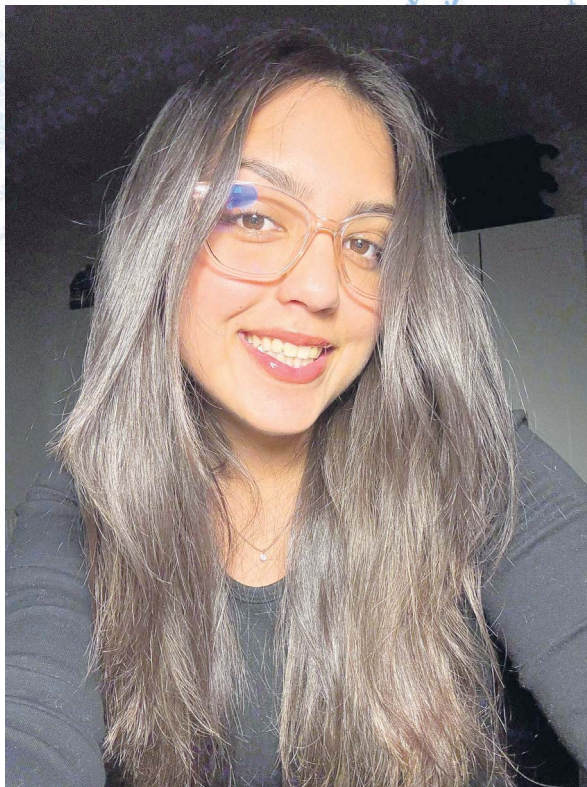
DIYA AGNANI

Diya is a student at Vrije University located in Amsterdam. She is a first year student in her three-year long biomedical sciences degree program.

Expectations and first impressions

My expectations for winter were already low, and yet it still managed to fall short. I thought it would snow a lot more than it actually did, but some of my Dutch friends had warned me that heavy snowfall is rare. Instead, the winter season is often associated with thick fog, which really adds to the gloomy atmosphere and seasonal depression.

The one time I did see snow, it was an incredible experience. It felt magical and was easily one of the highlights



of the season. However, walking in the snow was not what I expected; it was more like walking on ice rather than the fluffy texture I had imagined. It was definitely an adjustment, but seeing snow for the first time was still a memorable moment.

Adaptation and challenges

To prepare for my first winter abroad, I tried to go all out by buying a variety of clothing, including jackets, boots, and different types of socks, thinking I'd be fully equipped for the season. However, despite my efforts, some challenges were unavoidable.

The hardest thing to adjust to was daylight savings and how early it gets dark (by around 4:30). Going to school at 7:30 when it's still dark and coming back home when it's already dark felt strange, especially coming from a Caribbean island where the sun is almost always shining. It was very disorienting to go entire days without seeing the sun, and it definitely affected my mood and energy levels.

There were also unexpected challenges, especially with transportation. Since I have to travel between cities to get to school, harsh weather often causes train cancellations or delays, which make commuting frustrating and unpredictable. Additionally, I realized that some of the clothing I had bought weren't warm enough for me, and as a result, I got sick a few times.

Experiences and fun facts

The most memorable moment during my first winter was definitely seeing snow for the first time. It was an exciting experience and gave me and my friends something to talk and bond over. I haven't tried any winter activities yet, but I'll be going ice skating next week, and I'm really looking forward to it. It's one of those classic winter experiences that I'm eager to try.

One surprising fact about winter that I didn't know before is how much of a difference the wind makes. While the temperature itself is what technically makes it cold, the wind strengthens the cold in a way that's hard to describe. For example, 10 degrees with wind feels much worse than -2 degrees without it. It's something I've

had to learn to brace myself for, as the wind can be relentless and it makes being outside a lot less tolerable.

Tips and advice

If you're experiencing winter for the first time, don't underestimate how quickly the transition from autumn to winter can happen. Start stocking up on your winter wardrobe as soon as possible. When buying jackets, check the tags to see what temperatures they're designed for. I'd recommend getting one rated for -34 degrees because those are the warmest and most durable.

Winter boots are a must, especially if you're the type of person to rely on sneakers. It's likely that you will slip, especially on icy roads. Also, thermal pants are a lifesaver; you'll need to wear them under jeans or joggers to stay warm.

One thing I wish I had known before winter started is how important gloves are. I didn't wear them at first, and I ended up with bad cuts and rashes on my hands from the cold. Also, the specific Dutch scarves are great. They are super thick and do an excellent job of keeping your neck warm.

To stay warm and cosy, I usually stay home with the heater on. When I'm outside, layering is key. Wearing thermal pants and shirts under my clothes really makes a difference in keeping me warm and comfortable in freezing weather.

Personal reflections

Winter here is completely different from the climate back in St. Maarten. In St. Maarten, the weather is consistently warm, around 30°C, while here in Holland, it drops to around 0°C. There's really no comparison. It's a drastic and honestly horrible change for me.

One thing that stood out as a cultural difference was how people here handle the cold. When it was 12-16°C, I was bundled up in jackets, while others were walking around in shorts. That was definitely a shock for me!

After experiencing it, I can confidently say I absolutely dislike winter. No matter what, I don't think I'll ever grow to like it.

From positive experiences to negative ones, snow has consistently been a highlight for these three students. Maybe the enchantment of snow is truly magical, not just a fantasy we've adapted from movies. However, whether the downsides are worth it or not ultimately depends on the person. Each winter experience is unique, and while some find joy in the season, others may struggle to adjust. For those who had no choice but to adapt to the winter, at least you've now had the chance to have lived out the fantasy of experiencing a white Christmas!



Feature

Esmeralda Sutton: From Educator to Policy Advisor

Shaping Sint Maarten's Education System

BY ALISAH KIRTON

Esmeralda Sutton, a former school principal with over a decade of experience in education, has transitioned to her current role as a Policy Advisor for the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth, and Sport in Sint Maarten. Fuelled by passion and a commitment to nurturing future generations, her journey exemplifies the transformative power of leadership and vision in the field of education.

1: Please introduce yourself to us and tell us a bit about your hobbies, family, goals, etc.

My name is Esmeralda Sutton; I am 39 years old. I am a single mom of an eight-year-old boy. My hobbies include anything with music, such as singing, dancing, and listening to music. I also enjoy reading – when I do get the chance to do so. My favourite hobby these past years, however, would have to be weightlifting. I go to the gym five days a week to unwind and become stronger, not only physically but mentally as well.

2: Can you tell us about your journey leading up to your role as a policy advisor?

I studied English Language and Culture at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen in the Netherlands. I received my Bachelor and Master's degrees with a minor in writing, editing, and mediating. When I returned to the island in 2011, I started working at St. Dominic High School as an English teacher at the BSE, CSEC, and IB levels. I taught for 10 years before applying for the position of Student Coordinator, as I wanted to do more for the student population.

The year after that, I was appointed Interim School Manager and held that position for two years until I resigned in July 2024. My passion has always been education. From a young age, I knew that I wanted to become a teacher. As I grew older, the passion only became stronger. My goal was always to become a teacher, vice principal, and then to the ministry. It apparently did not go in that particular order, but I do think that all of the positions that I have held over the last 13 years have prepared me for where I am today as policy advisor in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth, and Sport. Once I am in education, I am home.

3: What are your primary objectives and responsibilities as a policy advisor?

Our primary objective is to ensure that all policies related to education, culture, youth, and sport are thoroughly researched and beneficial to the country. We advise the Minister on various matters relating to all of the departments within the ministry. And the responsibility lies on us as we are the ones who determine what happens to regulations, policies and so forth before going to the Minister.

4: What are the key differences between managing a school and advising on educational policies at the government level?

Managing a school entails dealing with all stakeholders, such as students, parents, teachers, and the school board

directly, dealing with disciplinary issues and measures, researching educational innovations that would meet the demands of that particular educational system, and so much more.

Advising on policies within the ministry is quite different as I have to now think about education on a national level, instead of on a school level, and the legal aspects to it: How would the policy being proposed be beneficial to schools? Is it lawful? Where and how does it fit in with our current situation? How will the students/teachers benefit from it? There are many questions that need to be asked before sending the policy to be signed off by the Minister. However, please note that policies reaching the Cabinet of the Minister have already been researched thoroughly before being sent to us.

5: How do you integrate lessons learned from managing a high-performing school into developing policies for schools with diverse challenges?

The Cabinet policy advisors do not develop policies. We only advise the Minister. However, in regard to integrating lessons learned from managing a high-performing school, I would say that I know what level of excellence I have required from the students, so I know what I am looking for when it comes to policies on a national level.

6: What leadership qualities do you think are most important for school principals today, and how can government policies support the development of these qualities?

I think school leaders, in particular principals, should be adaptable in all areas. Most educators within the schools are millennials, or older, and they are dealing with Gen Z and Gen Alpha. How we learned in school is not the way they learn or want to learn. We need to be able to help our students survive and thrive in the world in which they will be living. As a government, we want to cater to that ever-changing need to support the schools however we can.

Professional development is always the way for educators to keep up with the changes within education and the labour market – so that would be a priority for us as a Ministry as well. Furthermore, it is important for school leadership to understand that teachers are competing with artificial intelligence (AI), so we have to be able to engage our students differently. In reality, with the rise of AI, the physical classroom is outdated. The question is now: How do we keep up?

7: What are the most significant changes needed in the education system to support student success in the 21st century?

The most significant changes needed within the system is the integration of life skills and relatability. The curriculum must be able to reflect the current world that our students live in. Teachers must be able to connect their content with the realities of our students.

8: Do they need to integrate more technology and digital learning into the curriculum?

With regard to technology and digital learning, we have to teach our students how to be digitally safe and knowledgeable about the virtual world that they live in. They are the technological generation and learn things quickly; however, they need to learn about responsibility and dealing with consequences of their bad choices online.

9: Is the cultural heritage of Sint Maarten being preserved and promoted enough?

The Department of Culture within the Ministry is busy with different initiatives aimed at protecting, preserving, and promoting our national and cultural heritage, tangible and intangible. This is also something that needs



to be taught in our schools (more). The Ministry is busy trying to see how we can incorporate our culture and heritage into the curriculum as well.

8: Do you believe that both academic and trade-based schools play a role on our island; and how do you balance the needs of each?

All skills and talents are needed on the island. We cannot call on our doctors to fix our washing machines. So both are equally important in and for our society. Each level has its needs and we try to cater to them as much as possible.

9: What is your long-term vision for education in your region; and how do you see your current role contributing to that vision?

My long-term vision for education would be a system where students are engaged in their own learning and are eager to learn – a project-based system where our students are inventors and creatively exploring their skills and talents. Students, and parents indirectly, expect the teacher to be the sole entity to impart knowledge, but if there is no intrinsic motivation to learn, the extrinsic does not really matter.

In my current role, I would like to really get to the problem we face in our educational system. Many times, I realize that we have the habit and tendency of quick fixes, without any consideration for the long term. When the problem is identified, I think we can map out the direction we need to go in as a country and also have long-term goals for education. Keeping up with the latest trends is also key when it comes to how we should move forward.

10: If you could instantly change one thing about the education system, what would it be and why?

What I would change instantly would be the old way of thinking, because that is stunting the growth of the system. We tend to do things out of comfort and are afraid of thinking outside of the box. We must see it as expanding the box.

11: Who is your biggest inspiration along this journey?

My biggest inspiration to keep going on this journey has been my family, with God at the centre of it all. I always want to keep making my parents proud. They have supported me throughout my entire education and continue to support me however they can. I am forever grateful for them. When I have to put in those long days, they make sure that my son is taken care of.

12: Is there anything else that drives you to keep progressing?

Seeing and hearing of the successes of the students I have taught keeps me wanting to do more for the generations to come. And just having an interest in the wellbeing of this country's education and future is what keeps me going and doing what I do.



WHY A GAP YEAR COULD BE WORTH IT

BY ASANTÉ PHILIPPS

A gap year – typically taken between high school and college, or during a break from higher education – provides students an opportunity to step away from the stressed and confined aspects of academic life. While some may view this year away from education as a distraction, it can be one of the most valuable experiences a person can undertake.

A gap year has the potential for someone to recognize or build personal growth, skill development, and broader cultural understanding. The journey of a gap year should not be seen as a way for students to get comfortable away from education, but as an opportunity for personal awakenings. One of the plus sides of taking a gap year is the opportunity for self-discovery. The transition from the overwhelming environment of high school to the freedom of a gap year allows students to explore their interests and passions away from the academic pressures they may have experienced.

Students, who have no idea what career paths they are choosing, can use a gap year as a way to discover their future interests; even those who have a mind on what they want to become can often be persuaded by taking a gap year and finding a career path that fits them perfectly. A gap year is not just a pause from education, it is a time to acquire skills



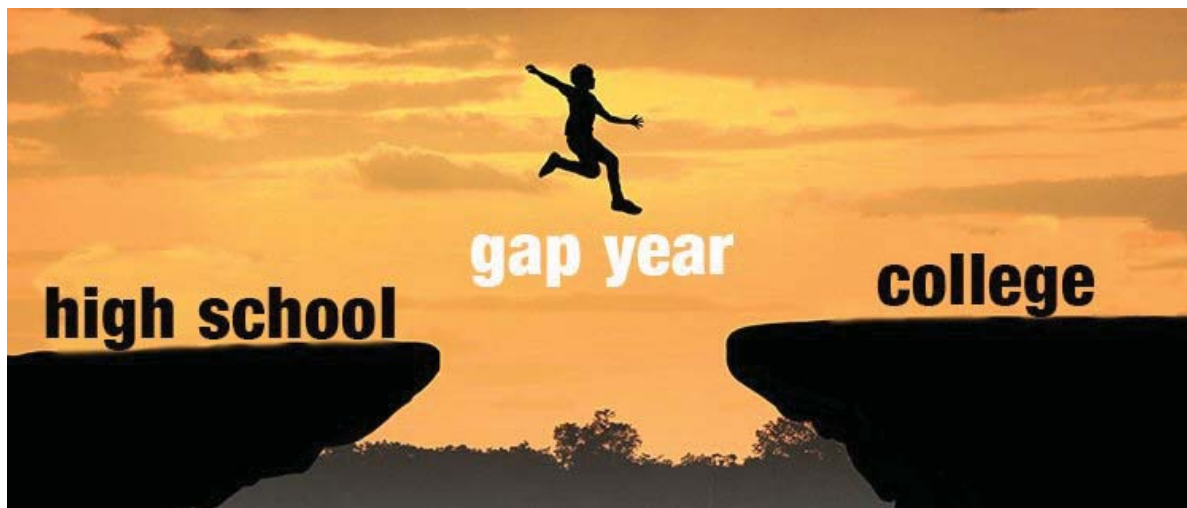
you wouldn't even imagine yourself achieving. Whether through volunteering, working, or traveling, students can gain skills that are crucial in today's job market. These may include emotional intelligence, adaptability, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities.

For example, working in a foreign country, in a diverse team or in customer service can enhance your communication skills, which is a skill many employers are looking for right now. By being able to speak different

languages, it allows many customers to feel not only understood by you, but also valued. To be able to have a stable life during a student's study years, funds are always a big factor. By taking a gap year, students can work to achieve enough funds for their future endeavours, apart from study financing.

Earning extra money allows students to have money for any personal or educational use they might need. For students, who are studying in cold climates, having funds

to prepare you for that weather is crucial. Among other things, these funds can be used for things such as coats, vests that keep you warm, and boots. Your extra funds can also be used for the maintenance of your living area and for any furniture you may need for it. A gap year has the potential to be an experience that offers opportunities for personal growth, skill requirements, earning extra funds and communication skills. Rather than seeing it as a distraction from education, students should embrace it.



Feature

SAFE DRIVING SAVES LIVES

BY ARTI BULLAND

Road safety is a serious issue in Sint Maarten. Recently, there has been a rise in accidents causing injuries, damages and even loss of lives. Many of these accidents could be avoided if everyone drove more responsibly. Driving recklessly as well as speeding unnecessarily puts the lives of drivers along with that of others at risk. To make our roads safer, we should follow basic safety rules and ensure that new drivers learn how to drive carefully.

Many drivers speed, ignore traffic signs and drive dangerously in busy areas. Another issue is that many people drive while distracted using their phones, instead of paying attention to the road. There are also some cases of drivers drinking and getting behind the wheel, which increases the risk of accidents. The small size of our island and areas with narrow roads make driving safely even more important.

There is also a great issue of bikers who do dangerous tricks on the road, probably because they want to “fit in” with their peers or because they think “it’s cool”; but they bring injury to themselves and to others. Young children are also found doing such, having learned these things from the people they are surrounded by – it doesn’t just come naturally. The company you are with really matters and can have a major influence on your life.

You should keep in mind the people you spend time together with and not be peer pressured into trying new things just to be cool and endangering yourself. We should do better to protect ourselves as well as the lives of others.

To make our roads safer, there are some basic safety rules to follow.

Here are some tips on simple road safety measures:

- Wear your seatbelt: Always wear your seatbelt even for short trips. It can keep you safe in case of an accident.
- Drive within the speed limit: Speeding is one of the causes of accidents. Drive within the limits, especially in busy areas such as Philipsburg and school areas.
- Avoid distractions: Do not use your phone while driving – don’t text and drive. Focus on the road at all times.
- Follow traffic signs and lights: Ignoring signs and running red lights can cause serious accidents.
- Keep your car in good condition: Check your brakes, tires and lights regularly to ensure your car is safe to drive.

If you are a new driver, it is important to learn to how to drive safely from the start.

Here are some things that you should do and what you should avoid.

What you should do:

- Practice in quiet areas: Start driving in less busy neighbourhoods to build confidence and learn how to handle the car.
- Learn the rules: Understand the traffic laws and signs before getting on the road.
- Stay calm and alert: Always be aware of what is happening in your surroundings and stay calm even if other drivers are impatient.



What you should avoid:

- Do not speed: It is tempting to drive fast to reach somewhere earlier, but speeding is dangerous, especially on the roads that we have here in Sint Maarten.
- Do not drive very closely to other cars: Keep a safe distance to avoid accidents if the car in front of you stops suddenly.

Making Sint Maarten’s roads safer is a shared responsibility; it can’t just be done by one individual. Drivers must follow the rules and respect others on the road. It is also important for first-time drivers to be educated in order to reduce accidents in the future. By driving responsibly, we can protect ourselves, our loved ones and everyone on the road. Let’s work together to make Sint Maarten’s roads safer for all.



JUDGE NOT!

Nowadays, teenagers have to face a lot of things that may make them embarrassed, shy, or even scared to talk. What's more, they always feel under pressure because of social media urging them to show perfect images, which make them feel incomplete. The judgment amongst teens is everywhere, and it can be so destructive.

Most teenagers feel that their every action, appearance, and opinion is monitored by their friends and classmates. This leads to a culture where being different or having different thoughts and ideas invites mockery. The result is that many teens get very hesitant to express how they truly feel or what they think, for fear of being talked about or judged. Pressures surrounding these instances add even more difficulties in letting them get their feelings out.

The following interview with a student counsellor was conducted to understand and normalize such issues better. This is an ongoing discussion reviewing challenges teenagers face and how they can improve their experience, creating an environment that is increasingly supportive and non-judgmental.

QUESTIONS

1: Can you describe some common emotional challenges that teens face today?

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Various fears, such as the fear of failure or rejection
- Feelings of inadequacy or incapability of meeting their own desires or the expectations of their parents
- Stress
- Bullying
- Peer pressure

2: How do you think social media influences teens' willingness to express themselves?

- Social media often encourages teens to express themselves through the examples they see.
- Social media platforms often create an environment where some teens feel pressured to present a curated version of themselves that aligns with perceived societal standards or trends.
- Some may even feel inadequate when comparing themselves to others who appear perfect online. This pressure can stifle authentic self-expression as they may choose to conform for the sake of "likes" rather than share their genuine thoughts and feelings.
- Teens should use social media to their advantage, and learn to be a creator not just a consumer. They need to realize that there is someone behind that screen that is waiting for what they have to offer. They will never know how many people they can encourage until they start.



3: What are some signs that a teenager might be struggling with feelings of shame or fear of judgment?

Signs that a teenager may be struggling include the following:

- Distancing themselves from others.
- Lack of connection with their peers.
- Changes in mood and behaviour.
- Consistently appearing downcast or unhappy.
- Negative self-talk.

4: What strategies do you recommend for teens to overcome the fear of being judged by their peers?

- Accept yourself for who you are and have confidence in your individuality.
- Identify aspects of yourself that you want to improve and work on changing them one at a time.
- Address any negative feelings you think others might be judging, and ask yourself if these thoughts you

are projecting upon others stem from your own insecurities. Remember that the assumption of judgment is often more a reflection of our own thoughts rather than those of others.

5: How can parents and teachers create a more supportive environment for teens?

- Establish open communication and accept what you're being told without judgement. Refrain from forming and sharing your opinion. Just listen!
- Teachers can create such environments in classrooms by fostering inclusivity and respect among students.
- Similarly, parents should encourage open discussions at home where teens feel heard and validated in their experiences.
- When the opportunity arises, use teaching moments to instruct and

steer them in another direction if so desire.

- Reinforce the idea that every individual is unique and has something valuable to contribute to their community and the world. Let teens know they are accepted and loved for who they are.
- Avoid comparisons and judgement, give them the space to grow into who they are becoming.

6: What message would you like to share with teens who might be feeling ashamed or afraid to speak up?

- It's important to recognize that feelings of shame and fear are common, especially during the teenage years. Many people experience moments where they feel embarrassed or afraid to express themselves. Acknowledging these feelings is the first step toward overcoming them.
- When you feel ashamed or afraid, it's crucial to validate those emotions rather than dismiss them. Understand that your feelings are real and significant.
- Remember, you are not defined by what happened to you.
- Respond to embarrassing moments with humour or grace, showing that mistakes are a part of life. The realer you are, the better.
- You have the strength to become who you truly are by learning to navigate and overcome those challenges.
- Always remember that you will not be accepted or appreciated by everyone, but that's nor a reason to compromise who you are. If you are constantly feeling ashamed or afraid to speak up, then that's not your space. Find a space where you are comfortable, but that also lures you out of your comfort zone and challenges you to grow. It's also a sign to get the help you may need to thrive in whatever environment you are.

Performing Arts Club Takes Centre Stage

BY LEHAR MARATA

St. Dominic High School has always been remarkable in promoting various clubs and organizations on campus; they have now added another feather to their cap with the introduction of the Performing Arts Club. Two students, Carlynaisha John and Sierra Hodge, wanted to show that their school is more than just

academics and has a lot of talent. Thus, their goal for this club was to provide students with an outlet to try new things and gain self-confidence.

Without much delay, they brought up the idea to teachers, from whom they received a lot of encouragement and support. They gathered their board members and supervisory teachers and underwent a smooth process with school liaison, Ms. Richardson, to get the club started. Currently, their board consists of four members: President Carlynaisha John, Vice President Sierra Hodge, Secretary Alexis

Duzong, and Treasurer J'aishaa Jeffers. Their two supervisory teachers are Ms. Constant and Ms. Duffus.

As of right now, the club membership has exceeded their initial expectations with 29 members – and they now hope to see more interest from the remaining student body in the near future. During their first meeting, the board was able to involve all members in hot topics of discussion relating to the performing arts field. The members expressed their likes and dislikes – an indicating that most members feel safe and welcome in the club. Along with other regular activities, they are busy planning

workshops for skill development, such as dance techniques and stage presence.

They are also preparing for upcoming performances at local competitions such as the Teen Times Talent Showdown. In the future, they hope to collaborate with other schools and/or organizations to take the club to new heights – for example, expanding the club to make it more accessible to all students regardless of experience level. They plan on involving teachers, who specialize in the field, to train new learners and develop skills for experienced members. Thus far, for the board members, the most rewarding part has been making students feel comfortable to express themselves and hone their skills, and they hope to impact the lives of many more students in the future.

The St. Dominic High School Performing Arts Club at is not only a testament to the school's commitment to fostering talent, but also to providing opportunities for students to explore their creative sides and build self-confidence.



Feature

Your diet, your future Make every bite count

BY SANYA JANDIAL

"I'm so dedicated to staying active and going to the gym; but I'm still not looking my best." Many people share this frustration, yet what they fail to understand is that food is the main factor in achieving success. You might spend hours at the gym, but if your meals lack balance, you could be unknowingly sabotaging your progress every time you open the fridge. It's okay and it's normal to eat junk food once in a while; but it's when your actions turn into a habit that this becomes a complication later in life.

What you fuel your body with is what drives your everyday life. Eating right can significantly improve your mental and physical wellbeing. It's as simple as eating eggs in the morning instead of a sugary cereal, or swapping fries for a salad at lunch.

The physical health benefits of eating nutritious meals are that they boost energy levels, strengthen your immune system, support heart health, promote digestive health, and improve your skin and bone health.

Sometimes, teenagers will notice their skin getting worse – and although this can be attributed to hormonal causes, diet also plays a crucial part. When you consume immense amounts of sugar on a daily basis, your insulin levels are increased, and this increases oil production and can clog pores and acne.

Try cutting out processed sugar for just one week, and see the difference for yourself! There are also many advantages to eating well that cannot necessarily be seen just by looking at a person. Proper nutrition can regulate hormones which release neurotransmitters, such as serotonin and dopamine, ultimately reducing anxiety levels. Another example is eating antioxidant-rich foods, such as berries or leafy greens, which aid in supporting memory, concentration, and overall brain function.

Consumer-driven temptations, especially regarding unhealthy or takeaway food, is a major issue that teenagers battle when focusing on their health journeys. In this day and age, it is very difficult to try to eat healthy when



everywhere you look, a new fast-food item is being promoted, or the most popular chocolate is getting sold out. We all know it's hard for teenagers to control their urges, so they give in.

It is important for people to stay informed on what they put into their body because it plays a big role in determining their quality of life. Even in places like St. Martin, where fast-food options are readily available, there are still healthy alternatives. Restaurants such as Fit Foods or Top Carrot offer healthy, delicious meals. They use locally-sourced ingredients, ensuring fresher, cleaner food with fewer additives and a smaller environmental footprint.

This is a recurring topic you might've

heard about time and time again on social media, in books, or from health-conscious friends, but getting started may feel overwhelming.

Here's a basic guide to what you should be eating in your daily meals:

- Protein (chicken, fish, tofu, lentils, dairy)
- Healthy fats (avocados, olive oil, nuts, fatty fish)
- Carbohydrates (whole grains, starchy vegetables, legumes)
- Fibre (fruits, vegetables)

Remember, it's perfectly normal to indulge in treats occasionally – after all, we're all human – but maintaining a balanced diet is key to feeling your best!



IS CHIVALRY DEAD?

BY JAHZARA PAYNE

The time of the year when love is in the air is getting closer. This is the time when the guys and the girls give their partners a gift and show them how much they truly care and love them. They don't always have to give a gift; they can also take them out or show their affection in other ways. But did you know there is also this thing called "chivalry"?

Chivalry is an honourable, kind, polite, and honest way of behaving – especially the behaviour of men towards women. This act was known as a knightly act in medieval times when the men used to show their kindness and their well-mannered behaviour towards the

women. In today's age, it is known as being a gentleman. Though lately, the act of chivalry is not quite seen. Why is that so?

"Chivalry is dead" is something we have all heard many times before on various occasions and on different platforms. It is usually said when men do not perform this knightly act towards women. Some acts of chivalry are simple like opening the door for her, or paying the bill on a date, or even buying her flowers just because. These simple things are known as acts of chivalry towards women; but lately, there have been countless complaints from women all over the world that men do not perform these



acts anymore.

Women even tell stories of times when they have gone on dates with a guy, who did not show one bit of chivalry like opening the car door for her; or walking on the outer side of the sidewalk closer to the street, and allowing her to walk on the inner side. This is not to say that there aren't men who do perform chivalry acts, but most of them certainly do not. Some men may not even see these as acts of chivalry, but they are nonetheless.

The men are not always to blame, however, as women play a counterpart in the reason chivalry is dead.

impact of chivalry dying – social media is one of them. Because everyone is seeing what everyone else is doing, they want to do the same. Women would see other women getting more, and they would want that same treatment. Not saying that women don't deserve similar treatments as others are getting; but some things are not a must. If you truly love the guy you are with, being there should be enough; and if you truly love the girl you are with, doing the simple acts of chivalry should be easy to do.

Let's try to keep chivalry alive, or else future generations will probably never experience it.



HOW SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCES OUR RELATIONSHIP

BY SHILOH WILLIAMS

In today's day and age, social media has an opinion and a perspective about EVERY SINGLE THING – from how girls should speak to boys, to if the girl should make the first move, to how to get the boy to make the first move. It gets exhausting and you start to feel like your life should reflect what you see on social media. I think it has gotten out of hand.

I'm going to get a bit candid for a minute: Before my current relationship status, I used to think

that I was the BEST PERSON a guy could be in a relationship with. I didn't really look at myself and see that I was asking and expecting too much out of the average relationship. Now don't get me wrong, having standards is necessary and important as they remind us girls that we deserve the world and deserve someone to treat us as such. But social media does tend to amplify them.

Just an example: I had a real argument with my boyfriend because he would not get me food – even though



I knew the circumstances, and I knew he couldn't come at the moment that I wanted him to. I just expected so much – from seeing the hotel rooms, and the flowers and all the extra gestures that social media shows you and you expect that to happen in your normal relationship.

Being with someone who is honest and real and points out flaws can open your eyes and help you grow, which for me is the ultimate benefit and privilege. Once the love is real and the respect is there, that is the important factor. When getting into a relationship, especially young, I definitely would advise you to do it your own way and focus on the love – the gifts, the gestures and the money are always a nice addition, but if the love

isn't real, it's not worth it. If the respect isn't there, IT IS NOT WORTH IT!!!

We are all young and we have to see situations for what they are, and not get blinded and carried away by social media. We can't expect boyfriends to buy us luxurious gifts; and we can't expect girlfriends to clean and cook and take care of everything. Love is universal, but everyone's relationship is very different and we should not allow social media to dictate our everyday thoughts, feelings and actions.

Badminton Club ORION SXM

BY SURAJ VASWANI

Badminton is more than just a sport – it's a way to grow, connect, and stay active. Whether you're a beginner who wants to try a new sport, or an advanced player, Badminton Club ORION SXM offers affordable coaching designed for all skill levels.

In this interview with the coach of Badminton Club ORION SXM, Mrs. Firoza Goswami shares her journey from being a national champion to becoming a coach who's passionate about promoting the sport in St. Maarten.

1: What inspired you to start coaching?

I was inspired to start coaching because of my passion for the sport of badminton and my desire to share that passion with the people of St. Maarten. Watching players develop their skills, grow in confidence, and enjoy the sport as much as I do is incredibly rewarding. I want to create a supportive environment where people can learn, improve, and experience the joy of playing badminton. Additionally, my husband Sunil and both my sons Aman and Rohan encouraged me to start coaching and giving back to the sport what it has given to me.

2: What challenges have you faced so far with having classes?

Some of the challenges include managing different skill levels within the same session, balancing individual attention with group dynamics, and maintaining engagement for all players – also, the lack of access to adequate badminton courts and proper training facilities. For example, the availability of dedicated padel courts and facilities across the island has helped the rise of the sport in St. Maarten.

3: Can you tell us about your experience in badminton before becoming a coach?

Badminton is my passion. I started playing the sport as a beginner at the age of 12 and fell in love with it immediately. With lots of hard work and dedication from my side, guidance from my coaches and unconditional support and encouragement from my parents, I started competing in district and state level tournaments.

Eventually, I became the national champion (all India level) and participated in international tournaments like the World Championship, the Asian Games, the Commonwealth games, Grand Prix and World Railway Games. Over time, I learnt a lot on and off the court, and got a chance to travel a lot as well and build lifelong friends, creating unforgettable memories all along.

This has led me to want to pass on the knowledge that I accumulated with others. Transitioning to coaching felt natural because of my desire to give back to the community.

4: What are the main challenges of coaching diverse skill levels?

Coaching diverse skill levels requires

tailoring training plans to suit everyone's abilities. Beginners need more foundational skills, while advanced players require fine-tuning techniques and strategies. Keeping sessions balanced so that everyone feels included and challenged is always the goal, but it's also one of the most rewarding aspects of coaching.

5: What benefits do you see for people who take up badminton as a sport, on and beyond the court?

It improves physical fitness, agility, and hand-eye coordination. Beyond the court, it teaches discipline, teamwork, and mental focus. It's also a great way to build social connections and relieve stress, making it beneficial both physically and mentally.

6: Can you walk a beginner through a typical training plan?

A beginner training plan typically starts with warm-up exercises to build endurance and flexibility. Then, we focus on fundamental skills like grip, footwork, and basic strokes, such as clears and smashes. As you progress, we'll introduce court positioning and game strategies. We also incorporate fun drills and games to keep learning enjoyable and interesting while gradually improving your confidence.

7: What advice would you give to someone who's hesitant to try badminton for the first time?

My advice would be to just give it a shot. Badminton is a welcoming and adaptable sport, suitable for all ages and fitness levels. It doesn't matter if you've never held a racket before – everyone starts somewhere. The important thing is to take that first step and enjoy the process of learning something new.

8: What is your long-term vision for Badminton Club ORION SXM?

My long-term vision is to grow the club into a vibrant community hub where players of all ages and skill levels can come together to learn, compete, and enjoy badminton together. I hope to develop talented players who

can compete at higher levels while also fostering a love for the sport in recreational players. Ultimately, I want the club to be a space that inspires growth, lifelong friendships and a connection to badminton.

partment.

To my people of St. Maarten, I invite you to come and join the club. Please feel free to contact me if you wish to start playing BADMINTON.

Contact:
Mrs. Firoza Goswami / +1 721 550 3431
Mr. Martijn Eerland / +1 721 526 3399

My eventual goal is not only to promote the sport of Badminton for recreational and fitness purpose but also to create a competitive team of St. Maarten kids to compete in the inter school and inter regional competitions with the help of the Sports de-



Is the Earth's rotation slowing down?

BY ADITI RAMCHANDANI

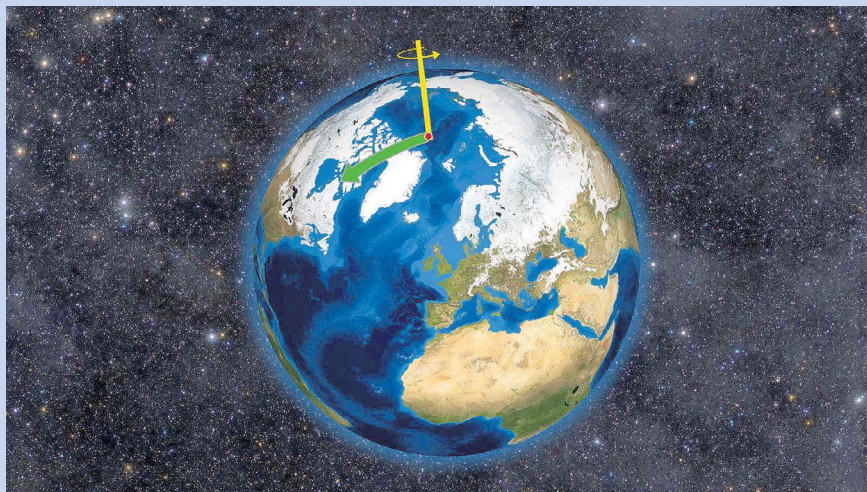
Yes, the Earth's rotation is gradually slowing down, but the change is extremely small and happens over very long periods of time. This gradual slowing is primarily caused by a phenomenon called "tidal friction", which is the gravitational interaction between the Earth and the Moon.

1: Tidal Friction

- The Moon's gravitational pull creates tides on Earth, and as the Earth's rotation moves the tidal bulge ahead of the Moon, it transfers energy to the Moon's orbit, causing the Moon to slowly move farther away from Earth.
- This energy-transfer results in a slight decrease in Earth's rotational speed.

2: Rate of Slowdown

- Earth's rotation slows down by about 1.7 milliseconds per century. This means that the length of a day increases by about 2 milliseconds every 100 years.
- Over millions of years, this can have noticeable effects. For example, hundreds of millions of years ago, a day on Earth was



only about 22 hours long.

3: Leap Seconds

- To account for the Earth's slowing rotation and keep our clocks in sync with solar time, scientists occasionally add leap seconds to the world's timekeeping systems.

4: Geological and Atmospheric Factors

- Events like earthquakes, glacial melting, and changes in atmospheric conditions can also cause tiny, temporary changes in Earth's rotation speed.

While the Earth's rotation is slowing down, it's happening so gradually that it doesn't significantly affect daily life in the short term. Over geological time, however, the length of a day will continue to increase.

THE WILDFIRES IN CALIFORNIA

BY ADITI RAMCHANDANI

As of January 22, multiple wildfires are burning in California, with the Hughes Fire near Lake Castaic being the most recent and severe. It has rapidly grown to approximately 5,000 acres (8 square miles) within a single day and is currently 0% contained. Evacuation orders have been issued for nearby communities, and schools in the area have been evacuated

to ensure safety.

Other significant fires include the Palisades Fire, which has burned 23,448 acres and is 68% contained, and the Eaton Fire, which has scorched 14,021 acres and is 91% contained.

Collectively, these fires have caused at least 28 fatalities and destroyed

over 15,000 structures. Weather conditions may bring rain, which could aid firefighting efforts, but also poses risks of mudslides and flooding in the fire-affected areas. Authorities are preparing for these hazards by deploying teams specialized in debris removal and flood defence.

Firefighting teams are working

around the clock, but the situation remains critical. Residents are strongly advised to stay updated through official channels and adhere to evacuation directives to ensure their safety. Emergency services are prioritizing life-saving measures and property protection while coordinating with local agencies to provide shelter and resources for evacuees.





CHINESE NEW YEAR

RICH HISTORY AND TRADITIONS

BY ZHUOYI SU AND ENHUA WU

Chinese New Year, also known as Lunar New Year or Spring Festival, is a time of joy, togetherness and prosperity that is celebrated by Chinese families all over the globe. From vibrant red decorations to the crackling sounds of firecrackers, the festival displays the rich, interesting and fun spirit of Chinese culture. This year's Spring Festival is on January 29.

History

There is a vast and interesting history of how the Spring Festival came about, which dates all the way back to 3,500 years ago when its customs underwent a long developmental process. Many might wonder why the Spring Festival is not on January 1, and why it is celebrated on a different day each year. Well, the Spring Festival is celebrated based on the lunar calendar, which tracks the phases of the moon, while January 1 is the New Year in the Gregorian calendar. Due to the two different calendars measuring time differently, this leads to separate celebration dates. Although they have separate celebrations, the Spring Festival usually ranges sometime between January 21 and February 20 on the Gregorian calendar.

There is a legend of why Chinese families do particular practices during the Spring Festival. This legend is about a mythical beast called Nian (which means year) who ate harvest, livestock and even people on the eve of the new year. People placed food at their doors for Nian in order to keep him from harming people and causing devastation. According to the legend, a wise old man discovered that Nian was afraid of red and loud noises, such as firecrackers. In order to prevent Nian from entering their homes, people placed red lanterns and red scrolls on their doors and windows. To frighten Nian away, cracking bamboo – later substituted by firecrackers – was lit.



Zodiac Story

Many might have heard a Chinese say, "I was born in the year of the dog," or "I was born in the year of the rabbit." These animals are called their Chinese zodiacs, and are all based on 12 animals: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig. Hence, there is a 12-year cycle where each animal represents a year in this specific order, and is a story or myth about these zodiacs and why they are in this specific order. The story started with the ruler of heaven and earth, called the Jade Emperor, who decided that naming a year with an animal would make it easy for its people to measure time. So he asked all the animals to take part in a race where they had to cross a rapid current river.

The cat and rat were best friends and the worst swimmers out of all the animals, so they asked the ox for a ride on its back to cross the river. But the rat felt selfish and pushed the cat into the river in order to win first place, and

the ox second place. Hence the reason the cat is not in the zodiac – and due to this, the Chinese believe that is why cats prey on rats. Third place went to the tiger. The rabbit then decided to cross the river by jumping on stones; but later when there were no more stones, it was afraid it was going to drown. Fortunately, however, a big log floated by and this helped it to cross the river and come in at fourth place.

The dragon came next at fifth. The emperor was surprised it did not come first as it could've easily flown. "But," said the dragon, "I had to stop and send rain to some poor farmers whose crops were dying of drought. Then I saw a poor, little rabbit clinging onto a log floating on the river, so I blew gently to send the log safely to the riverbank." Next came the snake in sixth place, the horse in seventh, and the goat, monkey and rooster in eighth place, ninth place and tenth place respectively. Moreover, the emperor was surprised that the dog placed eleventh

as it is a good swimmer, but it said that it could not resist taking a bath in the river. Last was the pig in twelfth place, because it got hungry so it stopped for a snack then took a nap. This is how the 12 animals in the zodiac were chosen.

Cultural practices

CLOTHING

The Chinese not only wear traditional clothing during the Spring Festival, they also have superstitions and they carry deep cultural symbolism about clothing that should be worn on the day of the Spring Festival. The traditional clothing is called *qipao* (cheongsam) which is only worn by women and it represents elegance. Some superstitions include: No black or white as it signifies mourning; wearing new clothing represents renewal and hope; and wearing red clothing signifies prosperity and wealth.

FOOD

Many Chinese celebrate this day by eating symbolic food, or what the Chinese refer to as "lucky food", which is said to bring good fortune for the upcoming year. Based on how they look or are spoken, these traditional Chinese New Year meals have lucky meaning. However, certain foods have different connotations depending on where you are.

- Dumplings (bring wealth) – Traditionally consumed on Chinese New Year's Eve, dumplings (饺子 Jiǎozi) are a popular meal in China, particularly in North China, and are considered a lucky snack for Lunar New Year. According to a legend, you can earn more money in the New Year if you eat more dumplings throughout the festivities. Typically, dumplings are produced by hand rather than purchased. Because dumplings resemble ingots (元宝 yuan bao), the currency of the past, eating them during the Spring Festival is believed to bring good fortune monetarily.

- Sweet Rice Balls (bring family together) – In south China, people eat sweet rice balls (汤圆 Tāngyuán) all during the Spring Festival, but they are the



12 ANIMAL SIGNS
Chinese Zodiac

 Rat 2020	 Ox 2021	 Tiger 2022
 Rabbit 2023	 Dragon 2024	 Snake 2025
 Horse 2026	 Goat 2027	 Monkey 2028
 Rooster 2029	 Dog 2030	 Pig 2031

primary dish for China's Lantern Festival. Tangyuan's circular shape and pronunciation are linked to reunion and togetherness. For this reason, the Chinese choose them when they celebrate the New Year.

- Fish (the word "fish" (鱼 Yú) sounds like "surplus" in Chinese) – Because they believe that if they have saved money at the end of the year, they will be able to make more the following year. Chinese people always prefer to have a surplus at the end of the year. Since fish has fortunate homophones for annual surpluses, it should be the last meal served with leftovers. It is customary to wait until the beginning of the year to eat the fish's head and tail in regions north of the Yangtze River. This is done in the hopes that there would be an abundance of food throughout the year.

- Chinese New Year cake (a higher income or salary) – Glutinous rice cake (年糕 Niángāo) sounds like it means "getting higher year-by-year". In Chinese people's minds, this means the higher you are, the more prosperous your business will be and general improvement in life.

- Spring rolls – Popular worldwide, but particularly in areas south of the Yangtze River, are spring rolls (春卷). Eating spring rolls is a way to welcome the arrival of Spring. The golden cylindrical-shaped rolls represent gold bars – which symbolize wealth.

LION DANCE

In Chinese culture, the lion symbolizes power, wisdom, and superiority. At Chinese festivals or other significant events, people do lion dances to ward off bad luck and bring good fortune. One of the most significant Chinese New Year customs is the lion dance. It is done to wish for luck and prosperity in the following year. The lion dance can also be used to spread joy and a celebratory mood.

BELIEFS: TABOOS AND SUPERSTITIONS

- DO NOT wash or cut your hair. In Mandarin, hair (发, fa) has the same pronunciation (and indeed is the same character) as fa in facai (发财), which means "to become wealthy". Therefore, it is seen as not a good thing to "wash one's fortune away" at the beginning of the New Year. It is believed that cutting hair on this day might bring misfortune to uncles.
- DO NOT do chores like sweeping, mopping, or throwing garbage the day of New Year or days leading up to it. It means getting rid of luck. The act of sweeping on this day is associated with sweeping wealth away. Taking out garbage symbolizes dumping out the good luck or good fortune from the house.
- DO NOT say unlucky words. It brings bad luck or mood for the year. Rule out unlucky words like 'death', 'illness',



- 'loss', 'sick', 'pain', 'poor' and 'empty' from your vocabulary. According to common belief, saying these words during the festival may get you stuck with them for the entire year and bring you misfortune.
- DO NOT take medicine. It is taboo for a person to brew herbal medicine or take medicine on the first day of the lunar year, otherwise, it is believed he or she will get ill for a whole year. In some places, after the bell announces the New Year at midnight, sickly people break their gallipots (medicine pots) in the belief that this custom will drive the illness away in the coming year.
- DO NOT eat porridge. Porridge should not be eaten, as it is considered that only poor people have porridge for breakfast, and people don't want to start the year "poor" as this is a bad omen.

- DO NOT wear white or black clothes, as these two colours are traditionally associated with mourning.
- DO NOT give numbers of four, as it sounds like death in Chinese.
- DO have dinner together as a family as it strengthens family bonds and signifies unity. It's a key tradition to honour ancestors and reconnect.
- DO save remaining food for the next day. It symbolizes abundance and surplus for the coming year, ensuring there will always be enough.
- DO have a joyful attitude as it is believed to set the tone for the rest of the year, attracting positivity and good luck.
- DO make sure to clean your house because this is called "sweeping away

- the dust", and represents a wish to put away old things, bid farewell to the old year, and welcome in the Lunar New Year.
- DO give red envelopes (lucky money) to kids. Parents usually give their children red envelopes after the reunion dinner, wishing them health, growth, and good studies in the coming year. Money in red envelopes is believed to bring good luck. As red is China's lucky colour, it's called *lucky money*.
- DO send Chinese New Year wishes. During Chinese New Year, Chinese people will greet each other with pleasant words like "Xin nian kuai le", which means "Happy New Year" (simplified Chinese: 新年快乐, 恭喜发财) – happiness and prosperity.



Feature

TEENTIMES 30

FOR THE YOUTH, BY THE YOUTH!

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JUNE 2025