

Interview With Mayor Alton Cooper

By Utila East Wind Staff



UEW: There is a lot of talk about the current investigation regarding Municipal accounting. Articles from La Prensa and El Tribuno both stated that there is a shortfall of Municipal funds in the amount of 9.3 Million Lempira. What statement do you, as Alcalde have for your constituency, regarding this audit and it's findings.

Alton: There was an audit completed and presented. We are providing all details asked for and I can personally assure the Community that this Municipality will be completely vindicated.

UEW: The speed bumps have been a hot issue. We now hear and see that they are being removed one by one. What are the reasons for removing the speed bumps and how will the speed of the traffic be controlled without them?

Alton: The intention of placing the speed bumps was to slow traffic. It turned out that the vehicles that were guilty of most speeding violations were the off road type motorcycles. These bikes can cruise right over the speed bumps. There were injuries from people on bikes not seeing the bumps also. We decided that it was safest to remove all the speed bumps except in front of schools. We are now taking care of the speeding problem by providing the Police with two new motorcycles to help patrol the community and setting heavier fines on speeders.

UEW: People are becoming more concerned about crime on Utila and the in-

ability of judicial system to prosecute and convict anyone. What is the Municipality, for its part, doing about crime on Utila?

Alton: We now have five Municipal Police Officers that work with the National Police to protect our Island. We are working with the Fiscals to insure that our officers are able to aid in the prosecution of suspects. We are very happy with the fact that this Carnival was a safe and fun event for everyone and I believe that we are making good improvements.

The Touristic Free Trade Zone is soon to come into effect. How do you see the people of Utila benefiting from The Zone?

Alton: The Free Trade Zone is soon coming into effect. The by-laws are being written now and once they are completed and approved the Zone will come into effect. There are plenty of advantages that will come to islanders when it comes to taxes and importing goods. A big one for the community is that jobs will be more secure for islanders. If you are a resident in the Zone you will have the right to work all other workers will need to apply to work on the Island and need a identity card to work. It is very important to make sure that the islanders have every chance to have the best jobs and the local business have an advantage with Tax Free Status.

UEW: There are plenty of infrastructure projects being talked about right now. Please comment on the status of these projects and any other projects that are in the works.

1. Desalination Plant

Alton: The desalination plant is nearing completion. The buildings nearly finished and the plant will be ready to go on-line in 2 to 3 months. This is a 40 Million Lempira project and will be a great improvement for Utila. The plant will produce over 15liters/second of purified water. The public lines will be cleaned and in the near future Utila will have purified water production that meet European Union Standards.

2. Bridge at Cays

Alton: The state of the existing bridge was a mess. The wooden posts were almost completely gone. We had to do something and decided that it was best to build a completely new concrete bridge that would last for many years and handle weather. The total cost for this project is 1.1 Million Lempira and will be finished by the end of the month.

3. Sewage Treatment Plant

Alton: This is a project that all the people will see is really needed. This 15 Million Lempira Sewage Treatment Plant Project will insure the future health and welfare of every person on Utila. It will also protect our coral reef and natural environment from future contamination. We will be having Open Municipality Community meetings to inform the islanders of the project starting in the coming weeks.

4. Road projects

Alton: The road projects we are ready to start now are in Sandy Bay going to Margarita Ville and on The Indian Road to the Public School. Sandy Bay is the entrance to Utila's Public Beach and we need this area to be newly paved. The Indian Road is a historic part of Utila and we will be repairing the area using the existing stones to keep this part of Utila History in place and make it safe for the people.

5. Alton Cooper Public School

Alton: The school is operating now and will be officially inaugurated in September. This will be a Municipal School for Utila. This is important for the community because it gives us direct control over the hiring of teachers and when the teachers are striking at the National Schools our teachers will be teaching.

6. Utila Community Center

Alton: The Municipality is very hap-

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py with the coming Utila Community Center which will be located on Jericho Road just north of Country Side. This will be a park and recreation area for everyone to enjoy. We will have a basketball court, Volley ball court, kids play structures and maybe some batting cages.

UEW: This is your second term as Alcalde of Utila. What do you think of your time as Mayor so far and will you be running for re-election?

I think that in my first 4 years as Alcalde my performance was fair. This second term as Alcalde I would say I consider myself a good Mayor. In the first 20 months of this term we have completed more projects than in the previous 4 years. It is fair to say that I am taking the bull by the horns and am looking forward to the upcoming elections. Utila, in my time as Alcalde has gone from an Island with power 18 hours a day (when lucky), dirty streets and poor water supply to one of the best Islands in the world to live on. Utila has a great future and if I am re-elected for a third term I can guarantee to the people of Utila, I will be an Excellent Mayor.

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