

For Immediate Release

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TOURIST BOARD WELCOMES SAILING HISTORY TO BVI SHORES

Road Town, Tortola, January 11 – The British Virgin Islands Tourist Board was on hand with many well-wishers to witness sailing history land on the Territory's shores last Friday. Geoff Holt became the first quadriplegic sailor to sail single handedly across the Atlantic Ocean, ending his voyage that began on December 10, 2009 in the Canary Islands to Cane Garden Bay, Tortola aboard a 60 foot, wheelchair accessible catamaran. While Holt did all the sailing and navigating of the yacht independently, on board was his personal care taker and a BBC cameraman documenting the journey.

The voyage titled, '*Personal Atlantic*', was not the first time Holt landed in the Virgin Islands or sailed across the Atlantic. In 1984 at the age of 18, Holt had made his third voyage across the Atlantic when a diving accident in Cane Garden Bay injured his spinal cord, paralysing him from the chest down. Despite his disability, Holt maintained his youthful enthusiasm for sailing and has worked through out Great Britain to expose disabled persons to the sport. He is a founding Trustee of Royal Yachting Association (RYA) Sailability in the UK, which provides many disabled people with the opportunity to enjoy the sport and competition of sailing.

Documenting his life as a sailor, Holt said, "Sailing has given me so much in my life. It was my livelihood before my accident and it was to be my saviour after it. The freedom I experience on the sea is like no other; I am free of my wheelchair and free of my disability. When I am on the water, it makes me feel alive and any sailor, regardless of their ability, will know exactly that same feeling. Sailing is my life."

At a welcome reception for Holt Friday evening, Deputy Director of BVITB, Malcia Smith Hamilton presented Holt with tokens of appreciation on behalf of the Territory. In expressing her admiration for Holt and his journey Smith Hamilton said, "What Mr Holt has

accomplished is truly inspiring to all of us and the BVI is truly thankful to be a part of his heroic journey.”

At the reception Holt emphasised that the decision to return to Tortola was not about closure or coming to terms with his accident at Cane Garden Bay, instead he said, “This was a celebration of life. If it was not for the accident I would have not had the life and family that I now have.”

Holt added that from his journey he hopes people will be energised to achieve their dreams. “I’m hoping that people will see my story and realise that whatever your problem in life might be, you can achieve your dreams. If you really believe in what you want to do, don’t let people put you off. If it is a disability or whatever it may be, you can accomplish your dreams.”

In 2007, Holt became the first disabled person to sail around Great Britain. Naming the journey, *Personal Everest*, the sail lasted 109 days, covering 1,445 miles and visiting 51 destinations. Holt is also the author of the book *Walking on Water*, a recollection of his life before the 1984 accident, after the incident and how he rediscovered sailing.

Organising Holt’s activities while in the Territory is Colin Bramble, Managing Director of RYA Sailability, BVI, a division of The BVI Water-sports Centre; the organisation exposes disabled persons to the joys of sailing. Bramble said, “From Geoff’s visit we hope this brings more awareness of disabled persons in the Territory as well as their achievements.”

While in the Territory Holt will be sharing his remarkable story with various groups. Participants of the BVI chapter of Sailability will also have the opportunity to speak and share with Holt. Last Saturday, Sailability hosted a fundraising dinner with Holt for the organisation at Myett’s.

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Notes to Editors:

Caption for attached photograph – Personal Atlantic Geoff Holt - Geoff Holt became the first quadriplegic sailor to sail single handedly across the Atlantic Ocean, ending his voyage that began on December 10, 2009 in the Canary Islands to Cane Garden Bay, Tortola last Friday. (photo courtesy of BVITB/M.Lettsome)

Colin Bramble is managing Geoff Holt's visit and stay in the Territory. For further information on Holt's journey and events while in the Territory, please contact Bramble at (284) 340 2071.