

Rebirth of Caño Martín Peña ^[1]

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By Cynthia López Cabán / End.cynthia.lopez@elnuevodia.com ^[2] endi.com ^[3] On the edge of street 10 of the Israel community, begins to flow a water thread that comes from the Caño Martín Peña in San Juan. The liquid that makes its way between the trash that still remains in the place, make a lot of residents smile with pride because it brings them closer to their dream: to restore the channel of the water body that bathes their community. For decades - before trash was used as a landfill give way to building houses – the water ran freely through this main artery of the Estuary of the San Juan Bay. It used to be 200 feet wide. Now it barely reaches three feet in some points. The goal is to bring it to be 150 feet wide. As part of this effort, and in advance to the dredging, this week there was an operation in two communities in the margins of the Caño to collect solid wastes. Preliminary numbers indicate that 253 tons of rubbish and trash wehre collected in Cantera, Israel and Bitumul, indicated Lyvia Rodriguez, director of the Office of the Corporation of the Project Enlace of the Caño Martín Peña Also 620 pounds of recyclable material, like plastic, newspaper, glass and paper, were recovered. This operation in addition to collect trash, it supposes to be a historical gathering of wills because it incorporates state, municipal, and community agencies and private companies. “For us it is vital because it means more health and a clean atmosphere”, affirmed Juanita Otero Barbosa, who has been residing in Israel and Bitumul for 46 years. “It means the beginning of the end of smell and the mosquitos”, she added. A block away, employees of the Department of Transportation and Public Works gathered rubbish and cleaned the street with water. “This is the birth of the hope of what is going to happen”, declared Otero. Works to rescue this zone include the relocation of 2.300 families, the replacement of electrical systems and the construction of a sanitary sewage system. Nearly 3,000 near residences and commerce unload used waters into the Caño. A dredge of a portion of the Caño is being considered, together with the sowing of mangrove trees, and the construction of recreational areas. The dredging, in addition, will allow fresh sea water to come in and will create the conditions for eco-tourism. This initiative should begin before 2012. For Maria Luisa Cotto,

another resident of Israel and Bitumul, what's happening with the eight communities of the Caño Martín Peña also talks about the power of the communitarian effort. "Here there are no political divisions. We are united as one", indicated the woman, who raised her five children in the place. 27,000 people live in the Caño area, divided in eight communities: Barrio Obrero (West and San Ciprián), Barrio Obrero-Marina, Buena Vista-Santurce, Peninsula de Cantera, Parada 27, las Monjas, Buena Vista-Hato Rey and Israel and Bitumul. "The best thing about this place is the sense of community", indicated Cotto. Also she is conscious of the message that their example sends. The communities of the Caño Martín Peña were first in establishing a land trust that guarantees the collective ownership of the land for the enjoyment and benefit of the community. "Our triumph is the triumph of the communitarian work", affirmed Cotto, while she glanced over the land where the Caño Martín Peña begins to resurge.

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