



Contact:

Jenny Hacker
GCI Group
(404) 260-3509
jhacker@gcigroup.com

Jackie Krawczyk
GCI Group
(404) 260-3515
jkrawczyk@gcigroup.com

U.S. Couple on Ultimate Caribbean Escape Aboard Hand-built Sailboat

Seven-month voyage takes Jan and Bruce Smith from Gig Harbor, WA, to West Indies

ORLANDO (March 6, 2007) – Though best known as a Caribbean folk artist whose work can be seen throughout the islands and in every Bahama Breeze restaurant across the United States, Bruce Smith would rather be on his hand-built 34-foot sailboat, *Woodwind*, than almost anywhere else in the world. The 52-year-old Smith is currently living that dream, as he and his wife Jan and parrot Lars are sailing from their home in Gig Harbor, Wash., to the islands of the West Indies, keeping in touch with the outside world via a satellite phone and their Web site and blog, brucesmithsvoyage.com.

“Jan and I love the Caribbean,” said Smith. “Nothing beats the people, the clear blue water, the trade winds, the palm trees and the food and music of the islands. We’re living the dream so many people have, to chuck it all and sail half-way around the world. And we’ve simplified our lives so we can focus on the experience, rather than get bogged down by schedules and details.”

In addition to taking care of numerous sailing-related chores, the couple also keeps busy aboard *Woodwind* during the seven-month voyage by reading, painting, cooking, fishing and writing their blog. Sometimes it’s the simplest things, though — a piece of driftwood or a perfect sunset on the horizon — that provide entertainment.

Since meeting in St. Barthélemy in the French West Indies more than 25 years ago, the Smiths have sailed more than 50,000 miles together. From 1988 to 1995, the couple spent most of those seven years aboard *Woodwind*, sailing through the Caribbean with their then infant son, Kess, before settling down to a land-based life in Gig Harbor. “The islands of the Eastern Caribbean have been our second home, off and on for 30 years,” Bruce Smith said.

A man of many trades, including boat-building and sail repair, Smith earns a living as a professional artist. His colorful signature artwork captures the simplicity and beauty of Caribbean life, and can be found in galleries, hotels and restaurants from Anguilla to Grenada, as well as in all 32 Bahama Breeze restaurants in the United States. Jan Smith is a writer and elementary school teacher; in fact, she left a reading list and curriculum materials with her school back home — Minter Creek Elementary in Gig Harbor — so the students there can follow and learn from the Smiths’ travels.

Bruce first escaped to the Caribbean from his native Connecticut in the 1970s, drawn to the laid-back lifestyle. While living there, he learned to build boats from a West Indian shipwright and earned a living as a boat-builder and sign painter in the Windward Islands.

Though painting signs paid the bills and helped him develop a sense of color, balance and composition, Smith said it didn't satisfy his artistic passion. So he started painting murals of island scenes in local rum shops and bars, developing a love for what is now his trademark medium — alkyd enamel paint, a substance similar to Rustoleum that's used by sign painters. It gives his work its distinctively bold color and depth and makes his paintings truly representative of Caribbean life and culture.

After six years roaming the Caribbean as a painter, Smith returned to the States and made a home with Jan in Washington. Almost immediately, inspired by his time in the islands and using the boatbuilding skills he learned there, he began building *Woodwind* out of slow-growth timber salvaged from the Mt. St. Helens volcanic explosion in 1980.

It hasn't been all smooth sailing during the Smiths' current voyage to the islands — including a brush with Hurricane Sergio in the Pacific, some rough seas and squalls and the sudden death of Jan's father that forced them to anchor off the coast of Costa Rica so Jan could fly back to Seattle to be with her family. For the most part, though, they said the simple life aboard *Woodwind* is a dream come true. And Bruce sees every minute as inspiration for his work. And their story now includes the recent emotional rescue of Haitian migrants off the coast of the Dominican Republic, which made them the focus on an international news story about their heroic actions.

“Sure, we've encountered obstacles along the way, but these experiences enrich our lives,” Smith said. “Not only is this an escape from the complications and stresses of everyday life, but it also gives us a true appreciation for the beauty of nature, and each other.”

To view or purchase Bruce Smith's Caribbean artwork, visit his virtual art gallery at bahamabreeze.com or brucesmithsvoyage.com.

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About Bahama Breeze

With 32 locations nationwide, Bahama Breeze invites you to Feed Your Island Spirit® with the food, drink and vibrant atmosphere you'd find in the islands. The restaurant is known for fresh, delicious seafood, distinctive chicken dishes and flame-grilled steaks, accompanied by refreshing, hand-crafted tropical drinks. Popular menu items include Breeze Wood Grilled Chicken Breast, Coconut Shrimp, Lobster and Shrimp Pasta and a daily fresh fish sheet offering guests a choice of several fresh fish species, preparations and side items. Most Bahama Breeze locations are open for lunch and dinner daily, from 11 a.m. until late, and all offer call-ahead seating. For more information, visit bahamabreeze.com.