Click-clack, click-clack; the familiar staccato sound her heels make as she races through the halls of the Catalina Service Center on another mission is well known by all who work there. The boundless energy and cheerful demeanor of Lucy Cruz, the Forest Supervisor’s Executive Assistant are legendary in the El Yunque National Forest; “if you want to get a job done quickly and accurately, with a minimum of fuss; take it to Lucy” is a common belief among the forest’s staff.

Lucy was born in Santurce, Puerto Rico; as a younger she moved with her family to Pasaic, New Jersey where she lived for 25 years, attending Passaic High School, graduating in 1972. Later she attended Drake Business School in Clifton, New Jersey where she completed secretarial and business courses.

Returning to Puerto Rico she worked for 13 years at the Navy Exchange at Roosevelt Roads Naval Station in Ceiba, holding assignments as Accounts Payable Clerk, Assistant to the Food Service Office manager, and Personnel Assistant in the Personnel Office. Lucy has been with the Forest Service at El Yunque for 16 years, attending Passaic High School, graduating in 1972. Later she attended Drake Business School in Clifton, New Jersey where she completed secretarial and business courses.

For the last two years Rolando Feria had a vision of doing music and arts events at the El Yunque National Forest’s El Portal Rain Forest Center. He figures that “such a beautiful place could host the type of events, that would be attractive to the tourist trade as well as to the local population.” It took him a while to work out all the details and obtain the necessary permits from the Forest Service, but finally it was approved and begun. Feria’s first event was presented at El Portal on Friday night March 2, 2007, with a second on Friday night March 29. A third event is planned for April 27. The first two events were very successful, both featured local artisans, local food and drinks. The first had an exciting Bomba y Plena cultural dance show, while the second featured world renowned Latin Jazz musician Charlie Sepulveda and his band “Turnaround.” Feria said “it was amazing, to hear that great music and be surrounded by the beauty of El Yunque with a full moon overhead; it was spectacular.”

Feria will continue to present these exciting events on the last Friday of each month. Come and join the fun!
From the Forest Supervisor’s Desk

Our winter and spring seasons are at an end. They have brought us both seasonal changes and challenges. The first of these challenges was several months of a severe lack of precipitation for both the island and the forest. We received half of our normal average rainfall during the months of January through April, posing a huge threat to our ecosystem. Another challenge we addressed was a small fire that consumed five acres of our national forest.

A further challenge was created by the recent US Department of State regulations that require American citizens to possess U.S. Passports when entering and exiting neighboring Caribbean island nations, resulting in a dramatic increase in our forest’s visitation. Concurrently, we lost our Senior Community Service Employment Program. For the past 45 years, the SCSEP program has provided our forest with a sustained workforce of dedicated senior citizens. The loss of these great people who labored unceasingly on a host of activities in this program over the years is a significant one to our forest.

To take up the slack, we are transitioning to a substitute workforce; we will rely more on the use of dedicated volunteers, augmented by work-release probationers from the Commonwealth penitentiary system. It has been a very complex and challenging problem for us to continue to sustain the high level of public service and ecosystem management for our beloved forest.

To conclude on a happier note, I would like to share our joy with you on the forest’s recent name change. This initiative was begun during our 2003 Centennial celebration, when former US Forest Service Chief Bosworth observed that since most local people referred to our forest as El Yunque, the forest name should be changed to reflect this sentiment. It took four years to achieve this mandate, but the hard work and persistence of our forest personnel paid off when, on April 2, this year President Bush changed the name of the Caribbean National Forest to the El Yunque National Forest by executive order. It was a great moment for us and for the Puerto Rican people.

Hasta pronto,

Pablo

Camp Santiago Project: Forest Experts Work Outside the Forest!

Since 1998 experts from the El Yunque National Forest have been helping the Puerto Rico Army National Guard with ecosystem management at Camp Santiago, an Army National Guard base near Salinas on Puerto Rico’s south coast.

Members of the Forest Service’s Camp Santiago project team have assumed the National Guard’s mission in implementing programs covering a diverse cross section of technical areas including both natural and cultural resources management, conservation management, and the maintenance and upgrading of the Geographic Information System (GIS) database.

Specifically, this little-known Forest Service program includes a reforestation project that plants 5,000 seedlings per year, the building of an irrigation system for planted areas, and an arborium for endemic and sensitive plant species, all integrated within Camp Santiago’s vast acreage.

The Forest Service cultural resources staff (an archaeologist, three archaeology technicians and four archaeology aides) is implementing Camp Santiago’s Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plan. The team performs archaeological surveys, evaluates cultural sites, and sorts and catalogs recovered cultural materials. A Forest Service GIS data specialist is helping Army Guard personnel to install and upgrade their GIS system, working with databases for cultural resources, natural resources, training and range facilities.

Forest Service Field Operations Supervisor, Luis Rivera said he and his 10-person team find the Camp Santiago project “both satisfying and challenging.” He continued “the work we do and the expertise we provide to the PRANG is diverse and multi-disciplined, but best of all, it’s never boring.”

17th Annual El Yunque NF Clean-up Day a Great Success

The El Yunque National Forest Customer Service Team’s Conservation Education Staff was recently named “Partner of the Year” by the Global Environmental Teaching Program of the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point. The award was given in recognition of the group’s “dedication to teacher professional development” during teacher exchanges in 2004, 2005 and 2006. CE staff members spent a large amount of time with teachers so they were able to gain a greater understanding of El Yunque, the only tropical rainforest in the US Forest System. For most, it was their first experience with a tropical rainforest. One teacher wrote: “I very much enjoyed the interpretive hikes on nature trails and was enthralled by the Conservation Education group’s informative presentations on endangered species, native and migratory birds and tropical forest conservation; all were superb.”

“This is a fine example of the El Yunque National Forest’s training expertise and our ability to successfully outreach” said Forest Supervisor Pablo Cruz. “Our Conservation Education staff is truly world class!”

As in past years, the El Yunque National Forest’s 17th annual Clean-up Day was a resounding success! Responding to this year’s theme “El Yunque is our forest, today, tomorrow and forever!” a record number of participants from surrounding municipalities came to El Yunque and collaborated with US Forest Service staff and the non-profit group “Yo Limpio Puerto Rico” to ensure the event’s outstanding success. On the big day, April 21st, over 800 volunteers registered at the forest’s El Portal parking lot volunteering to clean the trash from El Yunque, their beloved rain forest. The volunteer workers collected and bagged over 4,400 pounds of trash during the morning’s event.

The amount of trash collected was slightly less than last year; an encouraging indication that our forest visitors are disposing of their trash in waste containers rather than leaving it on the forest’s roads, watercourses and trails.

In the morning while their parents worked, there were programs for children including an activity that taught the kids how to recycle bottles, cans and plastics into separate containers.

The Croatto family provided musical entertainment for the volunteer workers when they returned to El Portal around noon to hear the results of their labor. “All in all, the event was a great success; it combined the satisfaction of a public service job well done, with the joy of meeting and working with new and old friends,” said El Yunque National Forest Supervisor Pablo Cruz.