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Lots of laughter, and even a few honks, emanated from Club Comanche in Christiansted Friday evening as the goose gang from Antilles Airboats got together for its 36th reunion.

The company, once the territory's largest commuter airline, folded in 1981, but that did nothing to dampen the spirits of the assembled gaggle. There were no feathers flying, at least not anymore, as old friends toasted each other, (or anything else handy), in an openly sentimental celebration.

Asked to recount stories, or at least explain why, after almost 20 years, their bond should still be so strong, Mary Simpson, former managing director, looked perplexed, then smiled, "I think none of us ever got over being with something so special and so much fun," she said. "I know I never got over the thrill of watching those little red and white planes come out of the water and waddle up the ramp," Simpson explained. "Or," someone else offered, "maybe we all just have a chemical imbalance."

Call it sentiment, or maybe chemical imbalance, whatever it is, it works for the 50 or so gathered Friday night. Joan Thayer, who came from Bartow, Florida for the party, said of her tenure running the St. Thomas accounting office, "I have had several jobs since that time, but they simply aren't the same. And they never will be," she added wistfully. Her hands were kept full with her own office, let alone ticket agents, mechanics and pilots running in and out demanding early paychecks, raises, or just some conversation. "Things were somewhat different in those days," Thayer said.

Lots of funny ticket office stories were shared by Norma Dennis, Veronica Challenger, John Payne, Bernard Samuel, David Wilkinson, Sonia Martinez Bob DeLugo and Liz Wilson, who among them at various times, kept the St. Croix ticket office afloat. The stories were edited by Simpson, just as she had to do when they were occurring; therefore, they won't be recounted here.

The pilots were in short supply, represented by Bruce Davis, ex-senator Holland Redfield and Lou Harris. Rupert Ralph, one of the company's first mechanics, recalled with Simpson his early days as a teenager. It was his first job. "I still miss it," said Ralph, who now works at the St. Croix airport. He echoed the popular sentiment, "It's just not the same."

Sorely missed was Fred Romney, who ran the first Boston Whaler in the St. Thomas operation when tickets were purchased at Caribbean Travel on the waterfront, and then taken by Romney as the passengers debarked the whaler for the goose. Romney is now living in St. Maarten.

Another prominent face, not in attendance owing to illness, was "Helen of Croix," a stable of the old Pan Am Pavilion ticket office, and purveyor of much wisdom to passengers and employees, alike. Same time, same place, same stories – next year.

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