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Territory Receives \$1 Million Worth of Media Coverage Through Tourism's Virtual Carnival, Department Says

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Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte By. THE USVI DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

While revelers are unable to jump up and play mas during the 68th edition of Carnival Virgin Islands on St. Thomas, the Department of Tourism's (D.O.T.) Division of Festivals' Virtual Carnival series is generating exceptional media coverage for the territory, D.O.T. has announced.

Ian Turnbull, director of the Division of Festivals, reported that tactics to move the carnival into a virtual environment are paying strong dividends that are expected to benefit the U.S. Virgin Islands once the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic subsides and leisure visitors return to the islands, D.O.T. said.

Turnbull, whose team recently unveiled a full schedule of Virtual Carnival activities and performances, including live-streamed village performances by leading Virgin Islands and Caribbean musicians and DJs, reported that media relations efforts have earned strong national media coverage in outlets such as Travel + Leisure, Essence, Travel Agent Central, Lonely Planet and Recommend magazine.

"Through the hard work of the Department of Tourism and our national public relations agency, we have earned approximately \$1 million in coverage just from the premiere of our 'Home Wuk' series, featuring disc jockey DJ Avalanche," said Turnbull. He added that while the marketing value had been priceless, the online presence also enabled the Division to share important public health messages to residents and potential visitors to the territory.

Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte predicted that the economic recovery for the Territory will be arduous, but believes that adopting strategies "to keep our beautiful islands and vibrant culture on the minds of our various publics during the pandemic is critically important."

"Life will be very different once global travel returns, and given the 'bread and butter' importance of tourism to the Territory, we will need to be strategic in our public health messaging and our travel marketing as airline itineraries return and accommodations begin to reopen across our islands," said the commissioner.

Turnbull reported that the initial Facebook Live event to launch the 'Home Wuk' series debuted with more than 75,000 views, 1,439 shares, 25,511 comments and over 2,400 reactions.

The Division of Festivals recently announced the launch of an expanded Virtual Carnival experience featuring replays of the 2017 and 2019 Children's and Adults' parades on WTJX-TV; live-streamed village performances by Fusion, Spectrum and Shaw HP bands, and local artists Pumpa and Mic Love; an online take on J'ouvert celebrations (dubbed "Jou'Virtual"); and performances by popular DJs and local and regional artists.

Additional performers for the Virtual Carnival line-up include Virgin Islands recording artist Pressure Busspipe who will perform on May 1, while Cool Session Brass and St. Lucia's groovy soca sensation Teddyson John will perform on May 2.

The Division of Festivals is also offering a weekly Carnival Zumba session with veteran instructor Gaynel Harris. The next class will be held on April 29, featuring top musician Shaw, who has a strong following among younger members of the Virgin Islands community.

"Our Virtual Carnival is a wonderful and timely opportunity to give back to our community, and to show the world the creativity and culture of the U.S. Virgin Islands," said Commissioner Boschulte.

He added that due to the significant decline in tourism activity, the Department of Tourism is considering promotions to leverage the pent-up demand for travel in general, and specifically, demand for a USVI travel experience.

The updated calendar for the Virtual Carnival is available at <https://tinyurl.com/y9q9aqnm>.