

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Ralph deChabert and Melbourne Clark: USVI Lawmakers Propose Commemorative Honors for Their Remarkable Service

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The Earl B. Ottley Legislative Building in St. Thomas, USVI.

Lawmakers on the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs & Consumer Protection on Tuesday considered two bills meant to honor Virgin Islanders whose work has had a significant positive impact on the territory.

Ralph deChabert is being recognized for “outstanding contributions in the medical field,” as well as his “many civic contributions to the community,” according to Bill 35-0102. Meanwhile, Bill 35-0125 honors the late Melbourne Clark “for his dedication, service and

contributions to the Virgin Islands community and law enforcement.”

The measures seek to name the Juan F. Louis Hospital North’s maternity services unit after Mr. deChabert, while Route 669 on St. Croix is slated to be named Police Lieutenant Melbourne Clark Drive.

Testifying in support of the measure honoring Dr. deChabert was Dr. Cora Christian, representing the Virgin Islands Medical Society. She described the 93-year old obstetrician as having love “first for St. Croix, second for St. Croix, and always for St. Croix.” As she detailed her professional interactions with him over the lifetime of her career, Dr. Christian described her senior colleague as a quiet man of undeniable power, authority and influence, calling him “the silent boss.”

She says he used that authority to advance the cause of medicine in the territory and on the Big Island, using it as “a vehicle through which he would make sure St. Croix was reckoned with.” Dr. Christian hailed Dr. deChabert for contributing “in every way he could to the growth and development of healthcare.”

Ivy Ashwood, a retired clinical care supervisor, testified that Dr. deChabert was once “the only trained obstetrician” on St. Croix, necessitating a round-the-clock on-call schedule. However, the stalwart physician still managed to find the time to play an “instrumental” role in the establishment of a sickle-cell clinic on St. Croix, as well as to found a treatment clinic for heroin addiction. She recounted Dr. deChabert’s more than 36-hour stint at the hospital during Hurricane Hugo, during which he ensured that patients, staff, and evacuees were all safe.

Other testifiers to Dr. deChabert’s dedication and character included Vivian Ebbesen-Fludd, one of the more than 15,000 babies delivered by the honoree during his lifetime of service. In addition to being delivered by him, she also received care from him as a patient in need of emergency medical services, and attested to his calm, professional demeanor. Ebbesen-Fludd also worked during Hurricane Hugo, echoing Ms. Ashwood’s praise for the doctor’s marathon stint at the hospital as the storm lashed the island.

Senator Marise James praised Dr. deChabert as a “reserved, elegant, classy man” with a good character, noting that she has known the family for years.

Meanwhile, Mr. Clark was remembered as a hard-working police lieutenant who rose to be the commander of St. John’s Traffic Investigation Bureau and a stellar basketball player locally, as well as on teams in Puerto Rico and New York.

Lieutenant Clark was known, said Virgin Islands Police Department Deputy Chief Uston Cornelius, “for his no-nonsense approach on our highways.” His regular media appearances to provide traffic updates and information endeared him to the public, Mr. Cornelius noted. He described the late police officer as a commander “that everyone looked up to – well-dressed, well-mannered, knowledgeable, and paid attention to details.” His time assigned to the Traffic Investigation Bureau proved to be an invaluable learning experience under the leadership of Lieutenant Clark, said Deputy Chief Cornelius. “He took joy in sharing his knowledge and treated all officers with respect.”

Mr. Clark’s eldest child, Ray Clark also helped to paint a picture of his father for lawmakers. The younger Clark fondly recounted how his father’s larger-than-life public

image as a police officer even inspired a song from Mighty Pat, fittingly titled "Officer Clark." His legendary intolerance for traffic infractions on the territory's roadways spared no-one, not even his beloved wife, who was reportedly over the speed limit one morning when she was pulled over by an officer. "Lo and behold, it was none other than her husband Melbourne Clark," his son recounted. "Daddy, in a very professional manner, exited the patrol car, requested the necessary items, and served Mommy with a speeding ticket." When asked why he went ahead with issuing the ticket, Lieutenant Clark reportedly replied that he would ticket his own mother if he caught her speeding on the roadway.

Legislators also shared stories of their own experiences with the two honorees. Senator Carla Joseph told of the time when, as a newly-minted driver, she was pulled over on her way to church because Mr. Clark thought she looked too young to be driving. "I pulled out my brand new driver's license to show him with pride," she chuckled.

After amiable discussion and much hearty reminiscing over the lives and careers of these two stalwart Virgin Islanders, the measures to honor them were both approved by committee members.