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Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico Celebrate 59th Annual Friendship Day with a Focus on Cultural Bonds

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A collage of USVI-PR Friendship's final Village Night on Oct. 8 at the Agricultural Fair Grounds for the 2023 event. By. BRIA JAMES/VI CONSORTIUM

The week of October 1, 2023, marked the 59th annual Virgin Islands - Puerto Rico Friendship Day, celebrated with a series of events emphasizing the theme, "Strengthening our cultural bonds with pride." The commemorative events included a religious service at the Sunny Isles Amphitheater, a reception at the Government House, and Village Nights at the Agricultural Fair Grounds.

Luis Torres, the chair of the VI-PR Friendship Committee, is keen on reigniting the close ties between both territories. "My vision revolves around reigniting the cultural bond we share with

Puerto Rico," Torres told the Consortium Sunday night during the final village night event. Highlighting Puerto Rico's contribution to the community, he said, "Puerto Ricans played a pivotal role in shaping our community." This year's celebration was made even more special with the presence of the Mayor of Vieques, Jose Corcino Acevedo, who emphasized unity, stating, "We are one."

Torres has ambitious plans for next year's festivities, the event's 60th anniversary. "My goal is to expand our outreach to public schools. It's vital for the next generation to understand and appreciate Puerto Rican history," he shared.

A highlight of the week's celebrations was the naming of the village after Domitila Vargas, a revered historian who has greatly influenced many. Vargas, humbled by the honor, expressed her surprise and gratitude, stating, "I've always preferred to work away from the limelight, so this came as a surprise. But it's a genuine honor." Vargas, who has been on St. Croix for 45 years and served in education for 36 of them, added, "From the moment I arrived in St. Croix, I felt a deep connection. The opening of the Village Night was my favorite event this week, as it celebrated both cultures, making it particularly special to me."

Sammuel Sanes, the Advisor/Liaison of the VIPR Committee, lauded the events' success and thanked the community for their overwhelming support. "I'm immensely grateful to the public, business, and government entities that backed the VIPR Committee. Their support ensures we can pass on this rich legacy to our future generations," Sanes concluded.