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USDA Honors Local Professionals, Commends V.I. Health Department on 50th WIC Anniversary

Food and Nutrition Service honors local WIC heroes and the Dept. of Health's impactful use of federal funds

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Renovation of the WIC Frederiksted Building, a two-phase effort, is expected to conclude in 6 months, according to Health officials. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program in the U.S. Virgin Islands with a visit to the territory to honor local program providers, local leaders, and participants.

Lizbeth Silbermann, the FNS Northeast Regional Administrator, was at the forefront of the celebrations, acknowledging the program's invaluable contributions to the nutrition and health of Virgin Islanders.

In a sign of satisfaction with the V.I. Dept. of Health's use of federal funding to renovate the WIC building in Frederiksted, Ms. Silbermann said she was thrilled to see the progress. "The idea of human-centered design is really important, and this building seems to really take that into account because it really talks about the client, and thinking about their experience in the WIC program," Ms. Silbermann told the Consortium during her visit on Feb. 16.

Among the honorees recognized during last Friday's event were local WIC employees Gloria Carlos and Hilaria Duval, who began working with the program since its early days in 1974, along with Linota Perez, who began her tenure with WIC some 44 years ago.

"I am excited to recognize the exceptional work of WIC professional staff who have been serving families of Virgin Islanders for over 40 years," Ms. Silbermann said. The staffers' commitment to providing essential nutrition services to women, infants, and children of the Virgin Islands stands as a testament to the program's foundational goals. "I think the WIC program has such a great history because of how important it's been for mothers and children," Ms. Silbermann noted. "And it continues to be one of our big success stories in how healthy they are in the future."

Department of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion said children are at the heart of the WIC program. "Everything starts with the baby," she declared. "You really focus on the baby, and then you pull everybody in. Because if there's anything that brings a family together, it's a new baby."

The two-phase construction project in Frederiksted will tentatively be completed in approximately 6 months, Ms. Encarnacion estimated, noting that officials were working hard to ensure that all security and safety considerations have been addressed.

The FNS, under the USDA, plays a critical role in ensuring that children and needy families have access to food and a healthier lifestyle. The Northeast Regional Office oversees a range of nutrition assistance programs from Massachusetts to the U.S. Virgin Islands, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, child nutrition programs like the National School Lunch, School Breakfast, and Summer Food Service Programs, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), among others.