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Dominican Heritage Shines in St. Croix with Grand Independence Parade

Bridging cultures, boosting the economy: The unstoppable rise of the Dominican presence in the Virgin Islands

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A woman celebrates with the DR flag painted across her pregnant belly, highlighting both national pride and personal joy. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

Though Tuesday, Feb. 27 will be the Dominican Republic's 180th independence anniversary celebration, the occasion, commemorated in St. Croix on Sunday, Feb. 26, marked its 15th year on the Big Island. While Sunday's commemoration was reminiscent of years past — with strong cultural representation in attire and music, among other significant DR traditions — the event also signaled an undeniable reality: the growing economic power of the bloc.

The parade started as it traditionally does at the Basin Triangle in Christiansted and ended at the Canegata Ballpark, where officials participated in a ceremony to mark the occasion while attendees patronized vendors. Parade participants included traditional masquerade costumes, local majorette performances, bikers, bands, and more.

Members of the Dominican community on St. Croix continue to open businesses in several sectors of the wider USVI economy — including construction, food and drink, and beauty. They are also aligning in governance, with several holding key roles in government.

According to Senator Samuel Carrion, a Crucian of both Puerto Rican and Dominican descent, the growth demonstrates how the Dominican community has embraced the Virgin Islands as their home and are increasingly contributing to the territory's economic wellbeing. "The Virgin Islands is a melting pot, and in St. Croix we have diverse ethnic groups from all over the Caribbean and other places, and they've made this place their home," he said.

The senator recounted the long history of migration between the Virgin Islands and the Dominican Republic. "If you look at history, there are people from the Caribbean who went to the eastern part of the Dominican Republic, worked there in the sugarcane plantations and developed families. That's why you find in the DR the Petersens, the Rosses, the Garveys, and then many of them came back and left families there. So we're all intermixed," he said. "Then you have this mix of culture, and that's why you see the traditional celebratory attire similar throughout the Caribbean. The unique thing about this is that they can celebrate their tradition and their culture in a place that is open and welcoming to everyone."

He emphasized, "They contribute to society and the community because many of them are hardworking individuals that have businesses here. We all know someone who has a business, whether it's a beauty salon, a restaurant, in construction, so they are active members contributing to the community. This is their way to recognize the blessings they've received here but also the connection to their homeland, and we welcome them as Virgin Islanders."

Bion Lorenzo, President of the DR Independence Celebration Committee, observed that the growth of Dominicans in the USVI is occurring not only in business but also through the integration of families. "I think we'll be growing everywhere," he said, predicting that a new generation of Virgin Islanders with Dominican ancestry will start to influence elections in the coming years.

Senator Kenneth Gittens engaged with attendees in the crowd. "I just want to say happy anniversary to the Dominican Republic community which has been a great and integral part of our community with the music, food, everything, and we embrace them just like we embrace all Hispanics. I always look forward to this as I look forward to the Virgin Islands–Puerto Rico Friendship Day," he said. VI-PR Friendship Day will be held on Monday, Oct. 14, 2024.