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St. Thomas Prepares for "World-Class" Carnival Experience

Collaborative efforts aim to ensure memorable and organized celebrations

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The St. Thomas Carnival Village on April 24, 2023 By. USVI DIVISION OF FESTIVALS

Preparations for St. Thomas Carnival are well underway, according to several stakeholders who testified before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety on Thursday.

Present were representatives of the Division of Festivals, Police Department, Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs and Department of Public Works, all intrinsic to the successful execution of the festival.

Director of the Division of Festivals Ian Turnbull said that the team was “dedicated to facilitating a world-class Carnival celebration that is not only fun, and memorable but safe [and] organized.” His division has convened several meetings since wrapping up the Crucian Christmas Festival in February, and for St. Thomas, continues to focus on “finalizing the intricate details for this year's event.”

Meanwhile, the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs is promising to crack down on “illicit commercial activities” including the sale of alcohol to minors, and “unauthorized alcohol sales.” Horace Graham, DLCA’s assistant commissioner, vowed that the department’s enforcement unit will take the relevant “decisive steps.” As St. Thomas Carnival kicks into high gear, DLCA will also monitor social media “for signs of illegal alcohol production aimed at the carnival audience,” he said.

Illegal production includes “jello shots, bottled concoctions and alcohol pouches” that the DLCA says lack the necessary labeling, including alcohol content. This, Mr. Graham cautioned, poses “significant health risks and legal violations.” The department intends to ensure that the sale of all alcohol complies with “rigorous licensing and labeling standards” and will rollout a series of public service announcements in the coming days. Required labeling standards include the government warning, and indicating the alcohol percentage in the beverage if it is above 6 percent.

Regarding the sale of food and drinks, the Department of Health will ensure all food vendors obtain valid health permits and certificates to minimize the spread of food-borne illnesses. Individuals must also provide “laboratory results demonstrating negative tests for parasites. Environmental health officers are expected to monitor food stalls to ensure “safe food handling, preparation and compliance with time and temperature control measures,” explained Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion.

Elsewhere, the Waste Management Authority will install receptacles for the disposal and collection of used cooking oil. Large bins will also be placed in strategic locations.

Among the priorities of the Department of Public Works is the identification and management of public and paid parking, construction of viewing stands and advertising road closures. Reuben Jennings, DPW’s assistant commissioner, explained that parking will be available at the Lionel Roberts Stadium at \$15 per night, or \$125 for five days. Assistant Commissioner of Police Mario Brooks assured a worried Senator Alma Francis Heyliger that necessary precautions would be taken to ensure the safety of all parked vehicles, whether in paid or public parking zones.

For Senate President Novelle Francis, this year’s St. Thomas Carnival plan briefs well. “All we can do is hope and pray that we are able to carry out all of these initiatives,” he said, though encouraging the preparation of contingency plans.

Senator Ray Fonseca was worried about perceived price gouging, complaining that he purchased a bottle of juice for \$13 during the 2023 festivities. DLCA’s Horace Graham, however, indicated that there is “no particular regulation” for the price of food and drink within the food village. Rather than attempt to impose price controls, he instead encouraged patrons to “shop around”.

Recounting how she had been injured at a stampede during the St. Croix Christmas Festival, Senator Diane Capehart worried about crowd control. “I was paranoid. I never went back to the Village. I was hurt. I had injuries to my hand. I had injuries to my back,” she said. Mr. Brooks, the VIPD assistant commissioner, has ensured that the planning agencies will “look at that holistically.” Officers, he explained, are trained to handle mass crowds and will be stationed in

specific areas for crowd control.

The first event on the St. Thomas Carnival 2024 calendar the Prince and Princess Show on April 13th and will conclude on May 5th with the inaugural Utopia Unity Concert, featuring Burna Boy.

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