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16 Exemplary Individuals and Organizations Celebrated by V.I. Legislature

Sports personalities, veterans, and cultural advocates receive recognition for their dedicated service and commitment

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On Monday, the Legislature formally honored 16 Virgin Islanders and local organizations during a Perma Plaque Ceremony at the Frits E. Lawaetz Conference Room in St. Croix.

All 16 had been previously vetted within the relevant committee of jurisdiction, with at least one conferred honor dating back to the 30th Legislature. Senate President Novelle Francis Jr., in his opening remarks, explained that “events like this remind us that those we're honoring today have helped weave the social fabric of this community and promote [the] tradition of giving back.”

The lengthy list of honorees included career public servants, former lawmakers, educators, sports personalities, veterans, scientists and entertainers. "Service and commitment have defined these award recipients," said Sen. Francis.

Along with their plaques, former delegate to Congress Donna Marie Christian-Christensen will also receive the Virgin Islands Medal of Honor. The medal will also be posthumously conferred upon Edgar Milton Isles, the late senator. Addressing the audience of honorees, family and other supporters, Dr. Christensen said she was humbled by the honors bestowed upon her by the legislature. Explaining that she was nurtured by St. Croix, she said "anything that I have done has been in just giving back. I always want the best for my territory." More recognition is expected to come her way, with plans to rename the Charles Howard Hospital to the Donna Marie Christensen M.D. Department of Health once demolished and rebuilt.

Senator Franklin Johnson, who cosponsored the legislation to honor former four-term senator Edgar Milton Isles, commended the honoree for "realizing the importance of volunteering his skills, lending considerable time to the community activities."

The sports personalities recognized during Monday's Perma Plaque Ceremony included basketball and horse racing aficionado, Alvin "Baby" Delano Burke Sr. Former Senator Kurt Vialet, who sponsored the original legislation, believed it would draw recognition to Mr. Burke's "dedication to the people of the Virgin Islands, his dedication to the youth of St. Croix, his dedication to the sport of basketball and horse racing."

Baseball and softball coach Eugene "Genix" Thomas was also recognized during the ceremony. "He believed in the development of anything local," noted Mr. Vialet. Receiving the plaque on behalf of his now-deceased father, Mr. Thomas's son shared that "the family is very happy that you guys have honored my dad." Athletic sensation Michelle Mychah Leone Smith, meanwhile, was honored for her outstanding contributions to track and field, with Mr. Vialet predicting an Olympic medal in her future.

Charlita Schuster and the Music in Motion School of Higher Dance Education also received official honors for the occasion of its 40th anniversary during Monday's ceremony. Ms. Schuster, a dancer and teacher, encouraged the community to support the talents of the youth. Similarly, the St. Croix Majorettes were celebrated for their "outstanding 50 years of commitment to nurturing youth enriching community service, advancing the art and sport of baton twirling and for its invaluable contributions to the cultural and social fabric of the Virgin Islands." Radio announcer Jose Julio Martinez, known commonly as Papi Love, was on hand to collect his plaque.

Perma Plaques were also conferred upon the Virgin Islands National Guard on the commemoration of its 50th anniversary, as well as Command Sergeant Major Charles David (Ret.) for his service to the Virgin Islands National Guard.

William Bohlke Jr. received official recognition for his assistance in the introduction of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Hurricane Hunters to the territory. The late Alicia Hansen having sponsored the original legislation to honor Mr. Bohlke, Senator Francis noted in her stead that "what I appreciate most in his unwavering commitment to the territory's aviation industry."

Kemit Amon-Lewis was also celebrated for his outstanding service and contributions to the marine science industry in the Virgin Islands. Mr. Vialet spoke highly of his contributions to coral reef preservation in the Caribbean.

Gloria H. Canegeta Waterman received honors for her contributions to education, while Roselin Maud McFarlane was celebrated as an “advocate of independent living for people with disabilities”. Joseph Olmeda was thanked for his dedication and service to the people of the Virgin Islands.

Finally, the Virgin Island Agriculture and Food Fair Board of Directors, the University of the Virgin Islands, and the Department of Agriculture received their flowers for 50 years of diligence in coordinating Agri-Fest.

For former senator Kurt Vialet, resolutions and honors like these are a way of “documenting Virgin Islands history.” Many more Virgin Islanders are down for official honors, including streets and buildings renamed in their honor, and in some instances, the commissioning of busts in their likenesses.

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