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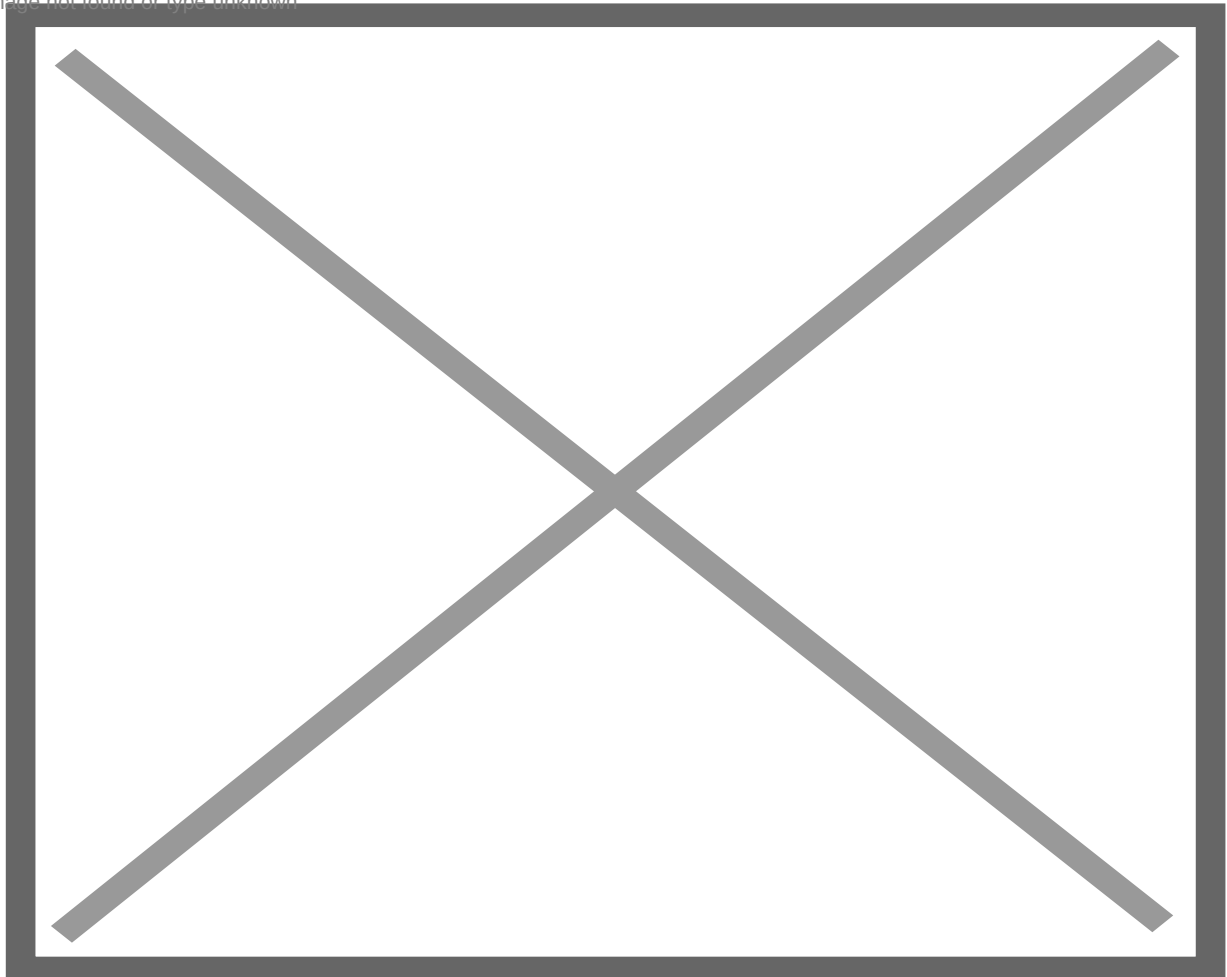
"Believe There is Hope for a Cure" Inspires Hundreds at St. Croix's Annual Relay for Life, Highlighting Survivor Stories and Ongoing Advocacy

Despite a shortened fundraising cycle, the St. Croix community raises \$150,000 at the Relay for Life event, supporting essential cancer services and research within the US Virgin Islands

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Tsehai Alfred **June 02, 2024**

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**The relay teams walk the St. Croix Educational Complex track in the Parade of Teams.
By. TSEHAI ALFRED, V.I. CONSORTIUM**

Survivors of cancer, along with their loved ones and supporters, gathered at the St. Croix Educational Complex on Saturday for the 24th annual Relay for Life. The yearly event honors those who battle against cancer, and raises money to support the continued fight. The theme

“Believe There is Hope for a Cure”, highlighted the ultimate goal of all cancer advocates.

?Because last year’s relay was held in October due to scheduling changes, the amount raised this year – \$150,000 – was less than in previous years, as less than 12 months have elapsed since then. However, organizers emphasized that the donation window was still wide open.

“All the money that you are raising here, 100% [of it] is invested in the USVI, and that's only true for the USVI because the rest of the American Cancer Society, we raise the money where it is and we use it where it's needed,” Dr. Lilian Santos, executive vice president of the American Cancer Society of Puerto Rico said. Dr. Santos said the money raised funds screening services such as mammograms and colonoscopies, as well as patient lodging and transportation. “We were able to serve over 300 patients...thanks to the money that you are raising,” Dr. Santos added.



The relay teams walk the St. Croix Educational Complex track in the Parade of Teams (Credit: Tsehai Alfred, V.I. Consortium)

Along with support from the American Cancer Society, the Relay For Life executive team largely organized the event. Chairperson Yvonne Webster-Pryce, Co-chair Urylee Burke, Coordinator for survivors Patricia Sage, Coordinator for teams Martha Mills, and Coordinator for luminaries Luz Rodriguez are known as the "Fabulous Five" for their hard work and commitment to the annual event.

One of Saturday’s events, the Empty Table, represented the journey of cancer with several objects placed around a small table, which itself symbolized “a place of dignity and honor”.

“There is a glass to represent those who can no longer toast at celebrations, however, a candle represents the light of hope that loves in the hearts of all of us— hope represented by cancer survivors and the hope for a cure through monies raised at Relay for Life,” Luz Rodriguez said during the presentation.

Survivor Donna Jones gave personal testimony of her own war with cancer, during which she has fought two battles — once in 2006 when diagnosed with ovarian cancer and a second time in 2022 when she found lumps in both of her breasts. “I’ve walked this road before. I know what to do and I know I’m going to be fine,” Jones said, describing what she thought when she discovered the lumps.

?Through the difficult treatment period for her breast cancer, Jones said she was crucially supported by the American Cancer Society, specifically thanking the ACS officials in the crowd.

“While battling cancer for a second time, Denise had me and Dr. Santos had me every single step of the way,” Jones said. Despite the immense support provided by ACS, Jones said they do not cover all of a patients needs, and during her heartfelt speech she thanked Denise and Dr. Santos for generously funding a portion of her care and treatment from “their own pockets.”

In closing, Jones said, “as of today, I can now say my name is Donna Brown Jones and I am a two-time cancer survivor.”

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