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Cultural Unity Shines at 60th VI-PR Friendship Celebration With Festivities Across the Territory

The week-long celebration highlights six decades of shared history between the USVI and Puerto Rico, featuring culinary competitions, live performances, and tributes to influential figures, culminating in a grand finale with local and Puerto Rican bands

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VI-PR Friendship Village on Saturday night at the Agricultural Fair Grounds in Lower Love, St. Croix. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

The 60th annual Virgin Islands-Puerto Rico Friendship celebration kicked off with several events this year to mark six decades of cultural unity between the two U.S. territories. The festivities, which culminate on Monday, have taken place across the USVI and include a variety of

competitions, performances, and special acknowledgments.

A highlight of the week was the announcement of the top three winners in the Arroz Con Pollo Competition during the Friendship Village event at the Agricultural Fairgrounds in Lower Love on Saturday night. Sylvia Mateo, representing Jessica's Food Truck, took first place for the second time, having previously won in 2022. "I am honored to once again come in 1st Place for the Arroz Con Pollo (rice and chicken) Competition. One of my main ingredients in all of my cooking is love. I will be back next year," Mateo shared with excitement. The second-place title went to Jacque Eastman of Lion Paw, while Dilenia Mercado from El Oasis del Sabor took third.

Luis Torres, president of the Virgin Islands-Puerto Rico Friendship (VI-PR) Committee, emphasized the importance of this milestone year. "This year we're celebrating the 60th anniversary between the VI and Puerto Rico, and we're honoring Miss Luz Maria Guadalupe Luis," he stated. The village was named in honor of Luz Maria Guadalupe Luis, the wife of former Gov. Juan Francisco Luis. Torres added, "She was instrumental in bringing the committee into Government House, turning what was once a simple luncheon into the grand celebration it is today."

Torres also took a moment to highlight the impactful contributions of Puerto Ricans to the Virgin Islands. "Many Puerto Ricans left their families to come to the Virgin Islands to work in sugar cane fields and other industries to help build our economy. It was a big sacrifice, and we must continue to honor that by celebrating our culture," he said.

At the village, vendors such as Judith Lewis-Figueroa of JuicyJuice Apparels returned for their second year to showcase their goods. "I love seeing everybody come out, especially the females. I brought some great pieces again this year," she said. "The VI-PR celebration brings out a diverse group of people every year, and it's a great way to support local vendors and enjoy the entertainment."

The long-running event has come to represent an important acknowledgment of the culture-shaping years of the territory. However, [during a Senate hearing on Friday](#), testifiers spoke of issues impacting the VI-PR committee and the need for reform and volunteers to not only keep it going but to infuse it with fresh ideas.

Even so, Mr. Torres said the 60th anniversary is a testament to the strong cultural bond that unites both territories. "It's important that we continue to celebrate our shared history, culture, and contributions. This is what keeps our bond strong," he said.

Events will culminate on Monday with the arrival of a cruise ship from Puerto Rico, followed by a lively celebration featuring both a Puerto Rican band and a local band.