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## **Festival Village Official Opening Honors 11-Time Road March Winner Kevré Hendricks and CHANT Leader Frandelle Gerard**

**Honored for his dedication to Virgin Islands music, Kevré Hendricks launches a fundraising initiative for school music programs. Cultural Night also celebrated Frandelle Gerard and CHANT for preserving the islands' heritage and history**

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**Local officials and honorees participate in ribbon-cutting exercise at the opening of Maestro's Musical Haven on St. Croix. By. DEAR PRODUCTIONS**

“It's got a nice ring to it,” quipped Kevré Hendricks, as he officially welcomed people to Maestro's Musical Haven for the first time on Sunday, fresh of his band's win at the first-ever USVI Band

Clash the previous night.

The 11-time road march winner, longtime music educator and band director, and 6-year veteran of the V.I. National Guard said that he initially did not understand the significance of the honor when he was first informed. Upon receiving the letter that this year's Festival Village would be named after him, "I thought that it was just, well, you're going to be recognized – come up, shake hands, thank you for your service," Mr. Hendricks said.

It was only when he began receiving a "resounding" number of congratulatory text messages that the impact of the honor began to sink in. "A lot of times you think that people are not paying attention," Mr. Hendricks mused. His dedication to music in the Virgin Islands comes from his philosophy of working "really, really hard for what I believe in," he asserted, immediately demonstrating that commitment by [launching an initiative](#) that will run for the duration of the Village this year.

"Every night of the Village is going to be dedicated to a school in St. Croix's music program," Mr. Hendricks declared. Patrons at the village are encouraged to post their monetary donations at the mailbox near the gate, or scan the QR code when it flashes on festival screens. "All I need from everybody is \$1," Mr. Hendricks announced. "The dollar that you could find under the seat in your car, that's the one I want."

Mr. Hendricks then followed up the announcement of the initiative by making the first donation – \$100 would go into the mailbox to support the St. Croix Educational Complex, where he directs the band.

Before Mr. Hendricks was officially bestowed with his honor, the evening recognized another cultural icon – Frandelle Gerard and her organization Crucian Heritage and Nature Tourism, CHANT. The Cultural Night honorees were chosen for their "unwavering commitment, artistic creativity, and playing a pivotal role in ensuring our cultural legacy continues to thrive," according to the plaque read out by USVI Festivals Director Ian Turnbull.

Ms. Gerard spoke of her deep roots on the Big Island. "My ninth great grandmother was enslaved in the north side of the island of St. Croix, in Frederiksted," she disclosed. Ms. Gerard reminded the audience that "what we celebrate today" as the Crucian Christmas Festival was borne out of a "fusion of traditions from our enslaved ancestors" who, on the day after Christmas, were given time off to "come together as families and communities on plantations and in our towns."

She reminded the young Carnival Royalty in attendance that they "stand on the shoulders of an African tradition of the recognition of leadership of youth and elders in villages...Our queen tradition has very little to do with the European monarchies," she continued.

Ms. Gerard acknowledged that as do this year's title-holders, she too stands on the shoulders of those who went before her, the founding members of CHANT. "What we've been able to do over the last 20 years is to share with Virgin Islanders, with students, with visitors, our history through our eyes; our authentic Crucian history. We don't whitewash it," she declared.

Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, in her remarks, noted how both honorees dedicated significant amounts of their time and energy to developing the youth of the Virgin Islands. She thanked them not only for sharing their gifts with the public at large, "but imparting that gift to the next generation; that is incredibly important for us to sustain what is these incredible Virgin Islands."

Senate President Novelle Francis Jr., during his time at the microphone, announced that he had been inspired by Mr. Hendrick's generous donation to make several of his own - \$20 for each night "because I'ma be here every night," Senator Francis declared. "I can't do \$100 tonight because I want to be able to buy a drink," he joked. He thanked the hardworking team who put the festival together, as did Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach, who made special mention of the vendors and bartenders who ensure that food and drink are plentiful throughout the festival village calendar of events.

Inspired by the creativity and talent on display, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. declared during his remarks that he had finally decided what he would do after his tenure as head of the territory's executive branch. "I'm going to start a band. I go play drums too...y'all think I'm playing?" he declared, stating that he had already taken the first step by purchasing a pair of electronic drum sticks.

On a more serious note, the governor reminded attendees that "each and every one of us really are capsules of culture," noting that the living history of the Virgin Islands is changing quickly between generations. "We each carry that culture forward, and we have to start telling the stories to our children, because we take it for granted that they know, but they really don't," Governor Bryan argued. "They don't know that we are people who freed ourselves."

This is the importance of the work being done by Mr. Hendricks and Ms. Gerard, the governor pointed out – ensuring that future generations understand who they are and where they came from.