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## Children's Parade Brings Culture and Joy to Crucian Christmas Festival

Over 30 troupes, including the St. Croix Majorettes and school groups, dazzled crowds in Frederiksted with costumes, dance, and traditions, while junior royalty and officials highlighted the importance of preserving Virgin Islands culture

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Janeke Simon **January 04, 2025**

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ST. CROIX — Friday's event on the Crucian Christmas Festival Calendar was the Children's Parade, where Virgin Islanders and visitors alike lined King Street in Frederiksted to witness the spectacle of tiny costumed dancers, majorettes and moko jumbies showcasing their talents.

Featuring over 30 troupes presenting themselves for judging, participants included the famed St. Croix Majorettes as well as troupes from elementary schools across St. Croix. Among them were

the Strawberry Scholars from Ricardo Richards who were out in full force, while the Juanita Gardine school transformed the street into a Fantasy Beneath the Sea. Students from the John H Woodson Jr. High school, with costumes featuring various madras patterns, celebrated VI culture under the theme Tradition in Action.

Also parading were a host of young royals crowned at festivals and pageants throughout 2024. Titleholders from the St. Croix Prince, Princess, Duke, Duchess, and Jr. Miss competitions waved to the crowds as they passed in their ceremonial vehicles, while those bearing sashes from other competitions including the VI Salsa Festival also made appearances. Junior royalty from St. Thomas also made the trip across to the Big Island. Ne'Keya Fraser, St. Thomas Junior Miss 2024, said that her favorite part of the festival was seeing the exuberant displays of dance and enjoyment as the children made their way down the parade route. The newly crowned Miss. St. Croix, Markeymah Cargile, was also present to oversee the festivities, noting that her reign would be focused on supporting young Virgin Islanders in their quest for self-actualization.

In general, officials were pleased with what they saw as the preservation and continuation of Virgin Islands culture as seen through the participation in the Children's Parade. Governor Albert Bryan Jr. noted that it is important for the territory's children to live authentically as a Virgin Islander. "I want all young people to know nothing's wrong with who you are, where you come from," he told the Consortium, explaining his penchant for speaking both in standard English as well as the local dialect during his public appearances.

Department of Human Services Commissioner Averil George pointed out that the Children's Parade is always the culmination of a season of intense preparation and hard work for the territory's youngest citizens. "That's one of my favorite parts about the parade, being out here and supporting the youth," she commented.

As the parade drew to a close, one of the last floats along the route belonged to the Superior Court Rising Stars Steel Orchestra, who treated attendees to an excellent program of soca music and underscored the true aim of the festival – to ensure that Crucian culture not only survives, but thrives, for generations to come.