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Collin Hodge Contemplates Ending Taste of St. Croix or Passing it On to New Entity as Event Sells Out on 25th Anniversary

With over 500 extra ticket requests and strong community support, the 25th Taste of St. Croix was a milestone success—but co-founder Collin Hodge says rising costs and industry shifts may lead to ending the event or passing it to new leadership.

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Taste of St. Croix 2025. By. DEAR PRODUCTIONS

Over 500 additional people sought tickets to this year's sold-out Taste of St. Croix, according to Collin Hodge, one of the founders of the event. The signature culinary affair, now in its 25th year, was held Thursday evening at the Divi Carina Bay Casino, bringing together chefs,

restaurants, and food lovers for a night of high-energy celebration, sampling, and live entertainment.

Taste of St. Croix has long been considered the premier culinary event in the U.S. Virgin Islands, with a reputation for spotlighting St. Croix as a foodie destination in the Caribbean. The event, supported by dozens of local chefs and restaurants, offers guests bite-sized samples of signature dishes as establishments vie for community support throughout the year. This year, the Office of the Governor, through TOSTX, contributed \$25,000 to support participating chefs and restaurants with their costs.

Chef Ozzie James, competing for the second time, took home the top prize in the soup category with his buzzworthy oxtail soup that drew long lines. He also served a flavorful layer of zesty lime-infused cilantro rice topped with tender grilled lamb chops and spicy seared salmon, finished with a sweet and savory drizzle of honey, Cajun spices, and a creamy coconut glaze. His food van can be found near the corner of the St. Croix Bypass in Mt. Welcome.

Crowds moved to the rhythm of local bands and DJs, savoring offerings from across the island. The event's success is well-earned, having built a loyal following through years of consistent execution. Many remember its earlier days held at the Divi Carina Bay Beach Resort, directly across from the casino, and the legendary Dom Perignon Afterparty once hosted by Bellows International.

But despite Thursday night's energy and clear demand, Mr. Hodge says the event's future is uncertain.



*Chef Jamal Miranda of Wokame Island Sushi Bar & Restaurant at Taste of St. Croix 2025.
(Credit: DEAR PRODUCTIONS)*

“The cost of doing this event is not the same as when it was 25 years ago. So it’s becoming a challenge,” Hodge told the Consortium. “I know the restaurants gave up their weekend to participate, so we made it a point to acknowledge that effort — and the results show in the quality of the event. I want to express my gratitude to them.”

Hodge spoke candidly about the physical, emotional, and logistical toll that organizing the event takes—especially in today’s climate.

“I have a daughter that’s growing up, I want to spend more time with her,” he said. “There’s so much factors that I got to assess — you know, the cost, the energy, my partners who are involved, the volunteers, the restaurants... how much more can they put out?”

In speaking about the evolution of Taste, Hodge reflected on the event’s early years and the shifting landscape of local stakeholders.

“There’s a lot of moving parts, and there’s a lot of parts that’s not moving. That’s another thing. “The reality is, there have been changes in the restaurant scene, changes in government leadership, and shifts among key stakeholders. Many of the people who were involved over the past 25 years are no longer around.”

He reflected on how the industry has evolved over the years and acknowledged that the new generation of restaurant owners may approach hospitality differently. “The love I have for this industry comes from how I started in it—it’s deeply personal for me.”

Reflecting on this year’s event and what may come next, Hodge said if everything aligns, the focus may shift toward training initiatives aimed at elevating service quality.

He stressed that operating a restaurant — or supporting a culinary scene — must be driven by more than financial gain. “You can’t aspire to open a restaurant just because you want to make money. So a lot of those areas is why this event is changing too, and why it’s becoming so challenging.”

Though no final decision has been made, Hodge admitted he is considering sunsetting the event or, ideally, handing it over to another organization that could carry the legacy forward.

For now, Taste of St. Croix remains a landmark cultural gathering — its 25th year a testament to its enduring influence — even as the future of the event hangs in the balance.