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## Estate Profit Community Center Redevelopment Begins With Focus on Youth, Families and Post-Hurricane Recovery

Sports, Parks and Recreation Commissioner Vincent Roberts said the center is “more than buildings,” while residents recalled its role in Head Start, special education and community events as officials marked the start of redevelopment.

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Gold shovels stand in front of the Estate Profit Community Center redevelopment sign, marking the official groundbreaking for the FEMA-funded disaster recovery project. By. GOV'T HOUSE.

Ground was officially broken Thursday on the Estate Profit Community Center redevelopment project, marking the latest disaster recovery project to move into active construction and giving residents and government officials an opportunity to emphasize that the territory's post-hurricane recovery is about more than restoring physical infrastructure.

The project drew reflections on the community center's former role as a gathering place, youth space, service hub and cultural anchor for Estate Profit residents, with officials saying the completed facility must be fully used once construction is finished.

Sports, Parks and Recreation Commissioner Vincent Roberts said community centers such as the one in Estate Profit "are more than buildings."

"They are safe spaces for our youth, meeting places for families, centers for recreation, culture, learning and fellowship. They are where friendships are formed, where memories are made, where communities strengthen themselves from the inside out," Mr. Roberts said. Over the years, "facilities like this quietly became part of the hard heartbeat of the community, and that is exactly why this renovation matters," he continued.

Mr. Roberts said the redevelopment also represents a commitment to the future of Estate Profit.

The progress being made in returning the facility to the center of community life "also represents promise, promise that our young people will continue to have a positive space to grow and develop, promise that families will continue to have places to gather, promise that communities like estate profit, will continue to receive the investment attention and resources they deserve," Mr. Roberts concluded.

For lifelong community resident Herminio Torres, the center is tied to years of personal and neighborhood history. Gesturing to areas that once housed Head Start, special education services and community events, Mr. Torres said residents are looking forward to seeing that activity return.

"That's what we want to see again," he declared. "We waited patiently, but we're going to have our community center back."

Contractor Persons Services Corporation is leading the work. Company President Paul F. Persons indicated that the project is expected to take about a year, while joking about the limits of what he could promise.

"They told me they'd kill me if I promised anything sooner," Mr. Persons said.

He said the project's success depends on collaboration across all levels, including residents.

"Projects like this succeed because of strong partnerships between government agencies, designers, contractors, subcontractors, and most importantly, the community itself," he noted. "Residents of Estate Profit, this center is for you. Thank you for your patience and support and your vision to make today possible."

Office of Disaster Recovery Director Adrienne Williams-Octalien also thanked residents for their patience, acknowledging that the project took years to move from planning to construction.

"This has been a very long road on this project, and I say this very honestly and earnestly, because there's so many steps to being able to putting the scope together, getting the funding, putting it out to bid,...sometimes we put it out to bid, and it's not enough money, and we have to figure it out."

With the groundbreaking ceremony serving as evidence that the financing and planning challenges had been resolved, Ms. Williams-Octalien said she looked forward to delivering a functional community center to the residents of “Machu Charl,” a phrase she assured attendees was intentional and not a mispronunciation of “Matthew Charles.”

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. used the occasion to connect the Estate Profit redevelopment to the broader effort to strengthen community infrastructure across St. Croix. He pointed to work done across Frederiksted, as well as projects in La Vallee and on Cramer Park Beach.

With several facilities either completed or underway, Governor Bryan said the next challenge is ensuring they are actively used.

“We gotta figure out a way to make this place alive and vibrant every day, not just weddings, not just the special community events, but somehow to make sure that we have kids running and playing every day.,” he said, adding that “we've actually created a whole new park system with a territorial park system, but there are no kids....When was the last time you stopped your car because a kid was running out in the road after a ball?”

The governor said encouraging children to participate in more face-to-face activities must be part of community development.

“We have to do more as a community to make sure as we build these things, we also figure out ways to get our young people to participate in them.”

Like Mr. Persons, Governor Bryan expressed hope that construction could move quickly.

“I really wish that we could have Tres Regis up here this year. That would be beautiful if we could do that,” he said hopefully. That way, it would be his last act "before I'm released as governor and you get a new person to beat up.”

The groundbreaking places the Estate Profit Community Center redevelopment among the territory's active disaster recovery construction projects, while also renewing expectations that the completed facility will once again serve as a daily center of activity, connection and support for the surrounding community.