

Image not found or type unknown

St. Croix Relay for Life Marks 25 Years With National Recognition, Survivor Stories and \$300,000 Fundraising Goal

At the St. Croix Educational Complex track, survivors, volunteers and American Cancer Society leaders said the 25th Relay for Life is about hope, direct aid and a community that raised more than \$200,000 toward a \$300,000 goal for local cancer support.

Community Center / **Published On June 08, 2026 07:15 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **June 08, 2026**

Image not found or type unknown



A Team Marsha banner at St. Croix Relay for Life marks the event's 25th year, celebrating survivors and supporters working together to raise funds, honor loved ones and help Virgin Islanders facing cancer through community action. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

ST. CROIX — St. Croix’s Relay for Life returned to the St. Croix Educational Complex track and field facility on Saturday with survivors, volunteers, supporters and American Cancer Society officials gathered around a cause that has grown into one of the island’s most enduring community movements: helping Virgin Islanders confront cancer through hope, remembrance, fundraising and direct support.

This year’s event, held on June 6, marked the 25th anniversary of Relay for Life on St. Croix. Organizers said 35 teams participated, each with a minimum of 15 members and a maximum of 25 in recognition of the anniversary year. The event entered Saturday with more than \$200,000 already raised toward a \$300,000 goal, with organizers hopeful that a promised \$100,000 government contribution would push the total beyond that target.

For Wendy Graham, a 16-year ovarian cancer survivor, the event was personal. She said she was diagnosed after giving birth to her last son and made a decision that she had to survive. “I have to live,” Ms. Graham recalled telling herself, describing a journey built on prayer, determination and trust in God.

She said her presence at Relay for Life was meant to show others that cancer does not have to be viewed only through fear. “There is hope, there is healing,” she said, adding that people facing the disease need to focus on recovery and understand that “it’s not a death sentence.”



Survivors at Relay for Life 2026 on St. Croix (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, V.I. Consortium)

Ms. Graham said her survival also required lifestyle changes. She changed her diet, added more greens and yellow and orange fruits and vegetables, drank plenty of water, prioritized sleep and exercised regularly at the Complex with friends. She said staying away from stress has been central to her health. “Stress free is the main thing,” she said.

Yvonne Webster-Pryce, executive director for the American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life St. Croix, said this year’s event follows national recognition for the St. Croix effort. She said the group received the 2025 Pat Flynn Spirit of Relay Award, described by American Cancer Society officials as a national honor recognizing a Relay event that embraces the full mission of Relay for Life.

Ms. Webster-Pryce said St. Croix was recognized for its care of survivors, its fundraising work and the services provided in the territory. She said national officials have referred to the local team as the “Fab Seven,” a reflection of years of work by volunteers who continue to exceed

expectations.

“All the money that we make stays in the Virgin Islands, not in St. Croix, but in the entire Virgin Islands to help anyone with cancer, any kind of cancer,” she said.

Participation and donations, organizers acknowledged, were somewhat lower than in some previous years, but Ms. Webster-Pryce said the community continued to show support. She pointed to one recent example at the bingo center, where supporters raised \$1,000 after a local appeal for donations.



Team Marsha at Relay for Life 2026 on St. Croix (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, V.I. Consortium)

Martha Mills, coordinator for teams, said Relay for Life had 35 teams this year, compared with 37 last year. Organizers had hoped for 50 teams, she said, but the teams that participated worked hard. Ms. Webster-Pryce also noted that Team Sunshine, chaired by Ms. Mills, raised more than \$23,000 with 16 members.

The funds raised through Relay for Life support Virgin Islanders in several ways. Organizers said assistance includes helping cancer patients travel off-island for treatment, including airfare for patients and, when needed, an accompanying person. Funds also support lodging through American Cancer Society programs for patients who do not have a place to stay while receiving treatment, along with screening support for underinsured and uninsured residents.

Ms. Mills said the organization provides certificates for mammograms, prostate screenings and colonoscopies, helping residents access early detection services that may otherwise be difficult to afford.

Government support remains part of the funding picture, but organizers said this year’s promised contribution had not yet been received as of Saturday. They said a similar appropriation was eventually received last year, though after the Relay event.

Brandt Woodward, senior executive vice president for field operations at the American Cancer Society, said the national award given to St. Croix reflected the full spirit of Relay for Life. He said the Pat Flynn Spirit of Relay Award is presented once a year to a Relay event nationwide that embraces survivorship, remembrance and the ongoing fight against cancer.

He pointed to the way St. Croix celebrates survivors, honors those lost through the luminaria ceremony, and supports those still fighting. “It signifies the spirit of the people of St. Croix,” Mr. Woodward said. “It’s amazing what a small group of individuals can do.”

Dr. Lillian Santos, executive vice president for the American Cancer Society in Puerto Rico, said she first came to St. Croix around 30 years ago when Relay for Life was being brought to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. She said the event has endured because volunteers continue to put a face to the cause.

People participate, she said, for mothers, fathers, sons, neighbors, coworkers and others touched by cancer. Walking in honor of someone or in memory of someone makes Relay more than a fundraiser, she said. It becomes “the biggest celebration of life.”

Dr. Santos said Relay for Life operates in more than 3,000 communities in the United States and in 36 countries around the world. For St. Croix to receive national recognition, she said, shows that the local effort is “a very special one.”

The event also highlighted broader cancer support work in the territory. Denise Molfuleda, Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands liaison with the American Cancer Society and chair of the Cancer Coalition, said several local organizations came together in 2021 to form the coalition. She named the American Cancer Society, Cancer Support VI, the Yvonne Ashley Galiber Foundation, Ribbons for a Cure, the St. John Cancer Fund and the Diane Hampton breast cancer foundation among those involved.

In 2022, she said, the V.I. Department of Health received CDC funding to begin a comprehensive cancer control program in the territory and adopted the coalition. The group has since expanded to include community members, the Department of Health, other government departments and partner organizations.

Ms. Molfuleda said the coalition works through four monthly work groups focused on detection, prevention, diagnosis and survivorship. She said one of its goals is to help bridge gaps in awareness and resources across the territory, where organizations may be working on related needs without everyone knowing what services are available.

The coalition’s work, she said, includes cancer education, screenings, financial assistance, lodging support during treatment and partnerships with local health organizations. She also said the coalition is preparing to support CKCI, expected to open later this year on St. Thomas, by helping spread awareness and connecting patients with financial assistance.

The American Cancer Society’s broader role in research was also discussed. Ms. Molfuleda said ACS is the second-largest funder of cancer research outside the U.S. government and that its research helps inform cancer guidelines, including when people should begin screenings.

Saturday’s event continued a long St. Croix tradition in which survivors are celebrated, those lost to cancer are remembered, and teams continue fundraising beyond the track. Prior Relay for Life events on St. Croix have featured the Parade of Teams, survivor-focused activities and luminaria ceremonies, with organizers emphasizing that funds raised locally remain available to support cancer patients in the Virgin Islands.

This year, organizers said the mission remains unchanged: raise money, provide direct help, encourage screening and prevention, and remind those facing cancer that they are not alone.

