

The Virgin Islands Consortium

J. Benton Donates Parts and Labor to Fix Years-Old Claude O. Markoe Kitchen Issue Before School Opens

After years of unresolved gas line problems at Claude O. Markoe Elementary, J. Benton Construction will provide parts and labor at no cost to complete the connection and install an ice machine, with the work expected to be ready when school opens Aug. 10.

Community Center / **Published On August 09, 2026 06:40 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **August 09, 2026**



ST. CROIX — J. Benton Construction has committed to donating the parts and labor needed to complete a long-unresolved gas line connection and install an ice machine in the kitchen at Claude O. Markoe Elementary School, with the work expected to be completed in time for the opening of school on Aug. 10.

The intervention follows coordination among Sen. Kurt Vialet's office, J. Benton Construction, the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance and the V.I. Department of Education. According to Vialet's office, problems involving the kitchen gas line have affected operations at the school for several years.

James Benton and his construction team agreed to supply the materials and labor needed to finish the outstanding work at no cost.

"Ensuring that our schools are prepared to welcome students and staff requires cooperation, urgency, and a genuine commitment to our community," Senator Vialet said. "Mr. Benton and his team responded when they learned about the need at Claude O. Markoe Elementary School. Their willingness to donate the necessary parts and provide the labor at no cost demonstrates the difference that can be made when the public and private sectors work together."

Vialet's office specifically recognized Benton, Luna Wittmann, Kip Garman and Maen Yusuf for their work, responsiveness and coordination. The senator also credited BCSM and the Department of Education with working alongside the other parties to advance the repairs.

"This has been an ongoing issue for far too long, and we are grateful to everyone who stepped forward to help bring it closer to a resolution," Senator Vialet said. "This contribution will help ensure that the school's kitchen is safe, functional, and prepared to serve students when the new school year begins."

J. Benton Has Long History of Public Projects in the Virgin Islands

J. Benton Construction was founded by James Benton in 2006, although the Benton family's construction history on St. Croix dates to the late 1980s. The company says the Virgin Islands remains its home base and that it regularly contributes resources to local organizations and community efforts.

Its connection to the territory's schools also extends beyond the Claude O. Markoe contribution. After Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, J. Benton says it assisted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with emergency recovery work and participated in efforts to provide temporary education facilities so public school students could return to class.

The company has also served as a contractor on major public infrastructure projects throughout the territory. J. Benton completed the first phase of the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport terminal expansion on St. Croix, a project that was finished ahead of its original March 2022 completion schedule and represented the company's fourth project for the V.I. Port Authority.

More recently, the St. Croix-based company has been involved in the construction team for the proposed territorywide airport redevelopment through its partnership with Consigli Construction.

J. Benton and Consigli are also leading construction of the new Donna M. Christian Christensen Health Center on St. Croix. J. Benton previously completed the rebuilt Women, Infants and Children facility on St. Thomas in 2023.

Vialet's office said it will continue working with education officials and community partners on remaining issues at the territory's public schools and on efforts to ensure students, educators and staff have the facilities and resources they need.

© Viconsortium 2026