

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bull And Bread Celebrations Go On Despite Budget Cuts

Entertainment / **Published On November 02, 2014 06:51 PM /**

Cynthia Graham **November 02, 2014**



Every November 1, all roads lead to Grove Place to commemorate the life and legacy of David Hamilton Jackson, 20th century labor union leader and St. Croix native who fought for freedom of the press rights and other liberties in what was then known as the Danish West Indies.

This year was no different.

A sizable crowd converged on the D. Hamilton Jackson Park on Saturday to attend the annual Liberty Day celebration, also known as Bull and Bread Day and D. Hamilton Jackson Day. The widely popular holiday was marked by commemorative speeches from

dignitaries and local students, musical performances, youth sporting activities, the introduction of contestants for the upcoming Miss St. Croix pageant in December...and, of course, the traditional feast of roasted beef and bread that is synonymous with the celebration.

Despite the largely festive mood, the financial difficulty in putting on this year's event was underscored during remarks from Denise Lewis, vice president of the Grove Place Action Committee (GPAC), the organization that puts on the annual event.



He told the crowd. "However, it burns my D. Hamilton Jackson Day that we had to say. Anything that is lacking here today, g."

Traditional bull and bread feast at

Liberty Day celebrations.

Lewis was making reference to Raymond Williams, longtime president of GPAC.

"There should be no need for us to beg to hold a celebration, on St. Croix, for a man as great as D. Hamilton Jackson," Lewis continued. "There is no reason why I need to be standing under a bandstand [whose] roof look that way. Look at it very, very carefully. And we talk about pride?"

Following her brief presentation, the *VI Consortium* caught up with Lewis to learn more about the budget issues facing her organization. She pointed out that GPAC receives annual funding to host the holiday event; however, this year, the group found out, at the

end of September, that its funding would be significantly less than in previous years.

"We found out at the late hour that it was extremely limited funds, it will be an insult to say the dollar amount, that couldn't even handle 20 percent of what was needed," Lewis said.

At that point, she said, a decision needed to be made on whether or not to proceed with the 2014 Liberty Day celebration.

"Most of us decided 'no', but Mr. Williams, being the leader that he is, decided that he would get it done," Lewis said. "So, he got it done, so hopefully we won't have any embarrassment today."

When asked about the specific dollar amount the government provided the group to put on the celebration, Lewis declined to disclose the amount, only stating that in past years, "we could have spent an easy \$20,000, but we do nothing close to that now. Nothing. We don't even spend a good \$5,000, and I don't think that's a lot to ask."

Regarding the roof issues noted in her remarks, Lewis said that prior to November 1, workers cleaned and refurbished certain areas of the park, but "as you can see, nothing was done to the roof. I mean, if you come to do something for the community to present the program, you should look at it holistically; you don't just look at cutting the grass."

She said the last time she remembered the roof being repaired was in 2000.

"I remember some major work being done under the Turnbull Administration, when we got the lighting in the field," she said. "But since that, I don't remember any major that was done in this community." She later admitted that a concession stand was constructed at the park under the current de Jongh Administration.

Lewis said while she supports Williams' decision not to cancel the celebration, she does not regret publicly disclosing her organization's financial hardships, which she said has surfaced in recent years.

"It still needed to be said because you have all the gubernatorial candidates out here and they need to know that next year is coming, and we have a bad economy, and it's extremely hard to go out there and beg people at the last minute," Lewis noted of GPAC's fundraising and sponsorship efforts this year.



She said if the organization was made aware in advance of the significant cut in its budget this year, "then it would have been easier." Lewis went on to say the organization had not inquired about the amount of funds available earlier because "it was always there."

"I'm not a last-minute planner; I have foresight," she said. "So, if you know there is no money available for November first, and we have to start allocating at the end of September, then I think I should have known that from April or May at the latest."

When asked about the cuts in the budget for the Bull and Bread celebration, Williams, an official in the Lt. Governor's Office and a St. Croix District Board of Elections member who is seeking another term, said, "We normally get a subsidy through the governor's office. We did get funding this year, but because of how the budget was passed, the governor's budget, his allotment for the first quarter, was cut down to 25 percent of the total fiscal year budget, so they had to cut our amount down, so we had to go out and seek additional funding."

With that, he pointed out some of the GPAC's cuts.

"There's certainly a few other things that could have been done, for example, the beef that we purchased, normally in a full-term election, we would purchase at least six or seven hundred pounds of beef," Williams explained. "But we had to cut back to about 350 pounds so we could have been able to get that paid for by the government." He pointed out that condiments were paid for by private sponsorship.

Williams also shared his thoughts on the turn out of the event.

"This year being a full-term election, as usual, it normally attracts a great audience," he said. "What is disappointing to me, yet still again, after twenty-seven years of managing this activity, is that the community don't come out for the purpose of today. They come out to electioneer, to campaign; I don't mind, but the literal purpose of today is a commemoration, a celebration of D. Hamilton Jackson. That's the reason why we have this holiday and we need to put to the forefront all the things that this guy did for this community."



And, St. Croix Educational Complex junior Iris Batise, in her keynote address, highlighted a number of things Jackson did for the Virgin Islands community. She said as a result of Jackson's leadership, "in 1916, the labor union went on strike because of the low wadges. This well-timed strike put a dent in the profits of the planters because without the laborers, the sugar cane wouldn't have been harvested. As a result of the strike, laborers won a significant wage increase."

Just as Williams pointed out, the event, just days away from the Nov. 4 General Elections, brought out candidates and supporters en mass. Hundreds of Christensen-Ottley supporters, from St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. John and Water Island, showed up donning blue t-shirts. The Delegate also gave remarks at the ceremony, stating that Jackson would have wanted Virgin Islanders today "to work for a better quality of life for us and our children."

One attendee said he had come to enjoy the festivities and hear what some of the political candidates had to say. Another attendee, a vendor, said she attended to promote the rights of senior citizens to the large crowd.