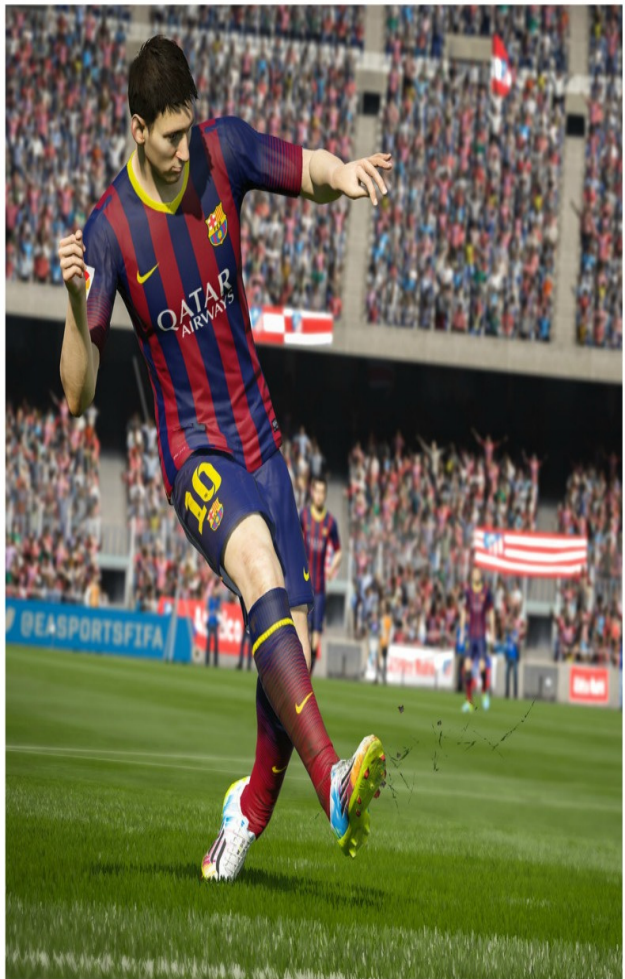


The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Croix Church Launches Video Games Tournament In Effort To Reach Youth

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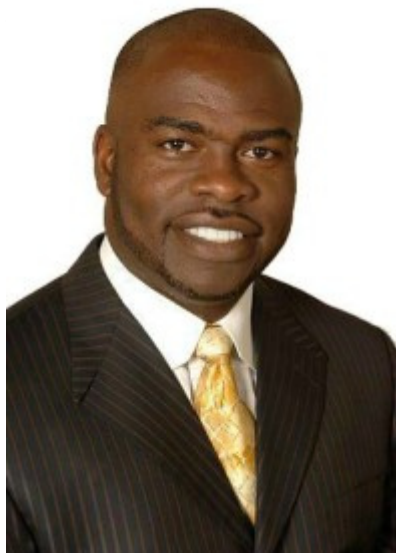
In an increasingly technological world, videogaming has become the favorite pastime for many people the world over--and it's no different in the Virgin Islands. According to a 2013 Huffington Post article, [research has found](#) that videogaming can be good for the brain, could make one smarter, slows the aging process, helps dyslexic children read better, can improve eyesight and is a good pain reliever.

However, some gaming non-enthusiasts have labeled the activity as the cause for many of the violent acts being committed by young people, although other research has shown [there is no long-term connection between gaming and violence](#).

One church on St. Croix is staying above the fray of the psychological effects of gaming, and is instead using the activity for what it is universally known to easily accomplish: bringing people together. [Speak the Word Ministries Intl.](#), is that church, and beginning on Friday, Dec. 5, the ministry will launch "Game Zone," a gaming tournament happening every Friday night from 6 p.m. until when the last round of games is played.

Co-founder and Senior Pastor, Dexter Skepple, said he decided to organize the tournament because he saw it as an opportunity to "bring teenagers together for something that they love doing." However, the pastor admitted that he struggled internally with the decision because he wasn't sure "how it would be perceived." He later concluded

people, feel; [as] I think that there's a lot more positives than



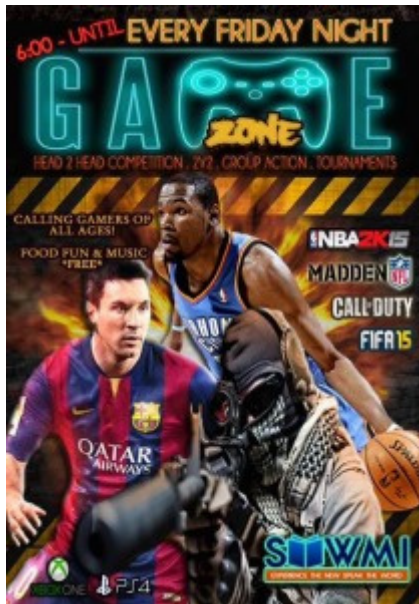
Senior Pastor of Speak the Word Ministries, Dexter Skepple.

Speak the Word has been investing in the lives of young people from its inception in 1999, and its efforts are paying off, Skepple says, with outfits such as the College Library, which helps put students on track for a career after high school. There is also a GED program for people who did not complete high school, tutoring for those who struggle with particular subjects, and the ministry's flagship offering, Open Academy VI, an online high school program.

As for the atmosphere of the tournament, Skepple said he is looking to cultivate something "festive."

"We will have food, drinks -- it's not just about playing, it's a league where there are winners and losers," he explained.

"What we're trying to do is draw young men into a more positive environment, where they can enjoy church in a whole different way," the pastor added. "Young people are the future of the church, you have to build for now and you have to build for the future."



[Click image for larger view.](#)

But, before founding Speak the Word Ministries, Pastor Skepple was an avid gamer himself and owner of the once-popular gaming arcade in Sunny Isle called PowerZone.

"I owned PowerZone, and this is kind of drawing me back to that,"he said. "I knew what it did for young people -- I saw it everyday, I saw the love for games, and still have relationships that were built as a result of PowerZone."

And, for those who may not be on board with the idea of a church hosting an ongoing videogames tournament, Skepple said, "If you don't understand it, you're going to criticize it. When people don't have a good knowledge of a thing, the human side of us criticizes it until we understand, and when we do, we go, 'Oh, that's what he was trying to do'."

The food is free and attendees will hear a mixture of gospel hits in a range of music styles. The debut tournament will include FIFA 15, 2K15, Madden NFL and Call of Duty. Games will be available for all ages.

For more information, contact Speak the Word Ministries at 340-778-1575.