

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## First Lady To Give Young Students Books For Christmas, Annual Governor Christmas Parties Cancelled

VIC News / **Published On December 15, 2014 09:08 AM /**

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First Lady Cecile de Jongh's newest book titled, "See The Virgin Islands March," a special commissioned work about the Virgin Islands anthem, will be distributed to the territory's youngest students just in time for Christmas.

"The Virgin Islands March is a stirring anthem and I wanted the children of the territory to understand the beauty of the words and how they reflect this wonderful community we call home," Mrs. de Jongh said. "I love this book and I think the children, their parents and the teachers will be happy with it, too."

Young artists from across the territory, ranging in age from 16 to 25, created the artwork that illustrates each stanza of the anthem, according to a Government House press release issued about the First Lady's efforts.

Mrs. de Jongh said in 2008, she and Governor de Jongh introduced the giving of special edition books to the territory's children at the Governor's annual Christmas parties--a significant change from the toys that had traditionally been presented to children that attended the gatherings.

"Early childhood education and literacy have been cornerstones of this administration for the last eight years, and the special edition books serve as a physical reminder of our resolve to strengthen the reading skills of Virgin Islands children," she said.

Nine thousand copies of "See the Virgin Islands March" have been published for Virgin Islands students by Mario Picayo of Little Caribbean Bell. The 32 page, hardcover book contains colorful drawings that depict each artist's view of their assigned stanza. Betty Mahoney of the V.I. Council on the Arts provided guidance in selecting the artists who worked on the project. A commercial version of the book will be available for purchase after the special edition copies are distributed to the school children.

Government House also announced that the Governor will not host his annual Christmas parties this year, due to costs involved and the transition to a new administration. However, the First Lady and a team of volunteers is expected to hand-deliver the books to kindergarten, 1st, 2nd and 3rd Grade classrooms within each public, private and parochial school, as well as Head Start facilities on all three islands.

Mrs. de Jongh wrote the book's foreword and the afterword was written by Alton Adams, Jr. in tribute to his late father, Alton A. Adams, Sr., who composed the music for the Virgin Islands March in 1917 (approximately 24 Virgin Islanders later collaborated on the lyrics). The elder Adams was also the first black bandmaster in the United States Navy.

The 21 artists who produced the illustrations are Jendahye Antoine, Aariyah Athanase, D'Andre A. Barry, Prea Bhandari, Marcos Castillo, Whitly Charles, Danielle Ebenholtz, Leah Ferdschneider, Christopher Lawrence, Joshua Lewis, Dhymond Nicholls, Brent Peter, Shakir Smith, Adia Titus, Valyne Toussaint, Shaedaya Varlack, Brianna Vazquez Smith, Yolinette Velazquez, Khadijah Weekes Nolan, Christopher Williams, and Jazmine Willock.

The special edition book project was funded by corporate and private donations made through the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands.