

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Stadium Groundbreaking Brings Out Dignitaries, Builder Seeks Skilled Tradesmen

Business / **Published On December 17, 2014 09:41 AM /**

Cynthia Graham **December 17, 2014**



After a decade of setbacks, the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation (DSPR) Tuesday celebrated the groundbreaking of the reconstruction of the Paul E. Joseph Stadium and Terrance Martin Ball Field, and the construction of a permanent Carnival Village--all to be built within the boundaries of parcel 40D La Grange and No. 3 Lagoon Street in Frederiksted.

The ceremony was attended by a host of public officials and dignitaries, including Gov. de Jongh, Lt. Gov. Gregory Francis, and Delegate to Congress Donna Christensen, to name a few. And despite the torrential downpours that made for tricky maneuvering under the medium-sized tent set up on the stadium's grounds to host the event, nothing

could dampen the celebratory mood of those in attendance.

In fact, DSPR Commissioner St. Claire Williams took to the mic and expressed the sentiment of many audience members, even as chairs in the tent were hurriedly being rearranged and attendees huddled closer together to avoid being soaked from the driving



Dignitaries brave heavy rains at

groundbreaking ceremony for Paul E. Joseph Stadium in F'sted.

"It seems like we're going to have a blessing here today, so let everybody be tight and we'll be alright," he said, garnering laughter from the crowd.

"It's cleaning the air," another man suggested of the heavy rain, making reference to the new era upon which St. Croix was embarking with the revitalization of the stadium.

When the ceremony began in earnest, Commissioner Williams, said, "It took us a while to get to this day, but thank God we are here today."

He further thanked everyone who played a role in bringing the project to fruition.

"We thank our everyday citizens who supported this project," Williams said. "St. Croix will have a state-of-the-art recreation facility we can all be proud of."

In attendance was Horace Clarke, 74, a St. Croix native and former second baseman for the New York Yankees and San Diego Padres, who was recognized for his legacy in Virgin Islands baseball history.

The gathering was replete with congratulatory remarks from key players involved in the project. One such person is Mr. Alphonso Franklin, president of community organization, Our Town Frederiksted.

"This begins a new era of sports recreation in the town of Frederiksted," Franklin said.

He went on to describe what the stadium meant to many in the community, in what he described as "the glory days of Frederiksted."

"Every Sunday afternoon, citizens of Frederiksted and surrounding areas, would stroll down to this field," Franklin began. "In my day, it was just a pasture called 'over the pan', today we are looking at a new, state-of-the-art facility of which we can be proud."

Franklin concluded his remarks by stating that the goal of the project was not "just to build a ballpark or a festival facility, but to put our people back to work."

Representatives of [GEC, LLC](#), the St. Croix-based contractors that won the \$20 million bid to complete the project, were also on hand.



hn Wessel, president of GEC, LLC.

The old Paul E. Joseph Stadium in F'sted will

be demolished and rebuilt into a new, state-of-the-art facility.

He said Delegate Christensen, "fought in Congress for the rum cover over tax when the Puerto Rican delegates to the United States Congress were trying to take that away from us. The funding that she was able to save is the funding that is going to bring this stadium to Frederiksted."

Wessle also thanked Sen. Alicia "Chucky" Hansen, who was in attendance, for her help in "shepharding this through the Legislative process."

Wessel, a longtime St. Croix resident, pointed out that his connection to the stadium is not sports-related.

"My history is not so much baseball, as it is with the musical venue here in the 1980s and the 1990s," he said, listing off a slew of headliners who performed there.

"The St. Croix Jazz Festival [with performers] from New Orleans and all over the states; the International Blues Cruise--we saw Tito Puente, we saw Third World, we saw Spyro Gyra, we saw Taj Mahal and numerous other live musical performances, right here, right on this field, and I want to see that again. That's my history here," Wessel said.

He added that GEC "is committed to the United States Virgin Islands. Our motto is, 'building the Virgin Islands with Virgin Islanders.'" With that, he recognized St. Croix native, Laurence Richards, GEC's senior project manager who is heading up the project.

In his brief remarks, Sen. Sammuel Sanes said of the project, "It's about time." He added that the rebuild is "the beginning of the restart of the most beautiful town in the Caribbean."

Lt. Gov. Francis encouraged St. Croix residents to "assume ownership of the facility."

"If you see someone being destructive, report it," he said.

He also implored incumbent and newly elected senators to "make sports a priority."

"If we invest in our sports facilities, it will make a difference in the lives of our youth," he said.

In spirited remarks, Gov. de Jongh praised Wessel.

"When this bill passed, for me, it was fine," the Governor said. "I had a contractor that job, and he did the job only by hiring Virgin Islanders, not 1 and on St. Thomas."



Heavy equipment ready to begin demolition and

reconstruction of Paul E. Joseph Stadium.

He continued, "Today isn't just about this facility, today is about the redevelopment and the commitment of the people of Frederiksted to making sure that we do things different and we do things better. To me, today is about what we do for our future and what we do for our people. As we put that shovel in the ground, I want to say 'thank you' to all the staff of Sports, Parks and Recreation for staying true to your beliefs of making a difference for our young people. For the pushing I got from the folks in Frederiksted to the St. Croix community, this is just the beginning of more that's going to come to get better."

Is GEC hiring ?

GEC, LLC is hiring. Applications will be available to the public the week beginning Dec. 21 at the stadium's work site in Frederiksted.

So, what kinds of jobs does GEC have available and what do qualified job seekers need to know about applying?

"I look at the project on a case-by-case basis," Richards explained. "Right now, I have to take down the roof, so I will have four guys that will start to take down the roof. Those four guys will start taking down the beams, for example. I need welders. I need different trades."

In order to work on the stadium project, Richards said interested applicants should first register with the Dept. of Labor. Secondly, if workers had not previously worked for GEC, they should submit an application.

"We will have [applications] available here in the trailer when we get set up," he said. "Folks can come to the trailer and turn in an application for employment."

While Richards said GEC already has a roster of former local workers from which to choose, he welcomes new workers to apply.

"And if they're a trades person," Richards said, "and we need that trade, we will call them up for a job. We hire on a case-by-case basis as the need arises."



that applicants should come prepared to begin work the day

Commissioner St. Claire Williams addresses audience

members at groundbreaking ceremony for Paul E. Joseph Stadium.

"One thing I would encourage, especially for the young people, when you come to the project site, come like you're ready to work," he said. "One of the problems I've run into is we have so many young men walk up, and they are in flip-flops and short pants and a t-shirt with their hat pulled backwards."

He recounted a story of a young man who showed up at a GEC work site seeking employment, with "his boots, his pants, his belt...a young guy ready to go to work," Richards said.

"We asked him what could he do. He said, 'I do a little bit of masonry'." Richards said the young man was given an application and hired on the spot.

While Richards would not provide specifics on what the design of the new stadium and ballpark would look like, he said, "We have a process and we recognize that there's been a charrette that's been done years ago and all of those things will play into the process."

The architects of record is Steven E. Hutchins Architects, a St. Croix-based firm, with assistance from Populous, an architectural firm based in Kansas City, Mo., which was responsible for building New York's Yankee Stadium, as well as have extensive experience with constructing facilities similar in size to the 3,500-seat Frederiksted stadium.

The project is projected to last for 30 months, with a grand opening expected to take place in 2017.

© Viconsortium 2026