

The Virgin Islands Consortium

CHS Celebrates Annual Cultural Fair With Crucian Culture On Full Display

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Cynthia Graham **March 22, 2015**



The front lawn of St. Croix's Central High School on Friday was the scene of the school's Annual Cultural Fair that showcased Crucian culture in all its glory with music, food, dance, historic reenactments and much more.

The event, now in its 25th year, was put on by Central High's social studies department and brought out about 800 of the 1,000-count student population, explained Ericka Hansen, department chairperson.

The effort was a part of the high school's annual VI History Month observance and garnered participation from both students and teachers with performances of poems,

songs, and quadrille dancing, as well as the showcasing of student artwork and a reenactment of the [1878 labor riot](#), also known as "Fireburn," that saw four former female slaves leading the charge for labor rights that culminated in the torching of Frederiksted



Handcrafted canoes by CHS

social studies students displayed at the school's Cultural Fair on March 20

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The event also garnered the support of the local community, as there was participation from legendary quelbe band, Stanley and the Ten Sleepless Knights who provided musical accompaniment for the We Deh Yah Cultural Dancers. Local ice cream maker, Armstrong Ice Cream, was also on hand to supply treats to attendees. In addition, the Lew Muckle Steel Pan Orchestra provided entertainment and a high-energy performance by Kylo and Stylee Band closed out the day-long festivities.

In explaining the outdoor event, Hansen said it was designed as both a way to reinforce local culture as well as bring to life to the topics students are being taught in the classroom.

"It's a display of the students' culture and all what they have been doing in the classroom over the year," she said. "It's just about keeping the culture alive. It's giving the students a chance to dance quadrille, plait the Maypole, display their artwork. It's just to get the entire school together and remember our culture here in the Virgin Islands because we don't want it to be lost."

Hansen said the response by the students was "overwhelmingly" positive.



Handcrafted student display at

CHS Cultural Fair

"We weren't able to finish everything on our program due to time constraints, but the kids really came out and they got involved. They kept coming and asking what they can do," she said. "Many of them did masks and moko jumbie dolls. They even created local dishes to provide samples. It's a way for them to come out of the classroom and express themselves culturally."

Michael Thurland, a Central High V.I. history teacher who also served as master of ceremony, shared Hansen's sentiments.

"It was great," he said of the students' participation. "You could see their enthusiasm. It's good to have this type of cultural component to keep the students engaged."

Hansen further pointed out that in its early years, the event was done on a much smaller scale and was relegated only to Social Studies classes.

"We're doing it on a bigger scale now," she explained. "Before, they used to do it within the department itself just for the Social Studies students. But, we have now opened it to the entire body."

Hansen said in order to put on the event, fundraisers were held to secure the sound services. However, she noted that many who participated rendered their services free of charge.



Student-made masks and moko jumbie dancer (upper right

corner) displayed at CHS Cultural Fair

"We had to pay the sound man and provide food for the band members that came, but most of the people you see here today volunteered their time. They are graduates of Central High who come back to give back," she said.

And what did students think of this year's Cultural Fair? Two ninth grade students told *VI Consortium* it gave them a greater appreciation for Crucian culture.

"It was very educational because we got to see a glimpse of our history," said Takiana Didier. "We got to hear poems and saw the quadrille dances."

"I liked how they acted out the Fireburn because I could hear them really well," explained Khaleese Figaro, who explained that during the performance she had to leave the lawn area to retrieve something from one of her classes, but she could still hear the actors because "they were being loud and I could fully understand what was happening."

Feature Image: Kylo and Stylee Band entertain students at CHS Cultural Fair on March 20