

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Wants To Make St. Croix Mecca For Sports & Events Tourism

Business / **Published On April 23, 2015 11:48 AM /**

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ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp has a plan to attract tourists to St. Croix, but it won't be reminiscent of what sister island St. Thomas offers.

Speaking during a wide-ranging radio interview with popular personality Mario Moorehead on Tuesday, the governor said his administration was in the process of leasing the territory's horse racing facilities to a horse-racing track operator from the US mainland, which includes "a complete reconstruction and build out" of both the St. Croix and St. Thomas facilities, a move that will provide much-needed jobs for those involved in the local horse racing industry, according to the governor.

"In terms of driving visitation and tourism on St. Croix, we're beginning this whole process of sports and events tourism, so you're going to hear an announcement soon where we're going to be leveraging our horse racing facilities out to a horse track operator/owner," Mapp said.

The governor also made known that in the contract, the government has committed to spending \$500,000 annually over the next ten years for sponsoring ten major purses on the St. Croix and St. Thomas tracks.

However, although St. Thomas is included in the racing and events tourism layout that the governor and his team have set forth, the focal point of said strategy will be St. Croix, he said, asserting that the island's geographical arrangement lends itself to the industry.

"The whole objective of this process is to really become the center of racing in this region, and give folks an incentive to grow and get into the racing industry in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and to have others from outside travel to the islands for the purposes of racing," Mapp said. "And clearly, given the amount of land and the way St. Croix is situated, we agree with Sen. Neville James (D-STX) that St. Croix should be the centerpiece of this particular strategy."

In relation to funding for the reconstruction of the facilities' infrastructure, which Mapp said will cost millions of dollars, the company that's contracted will use its own capital, the governor confirmed.

And relative to the use of illegal drugs during events, the territory's leader said there will be rigorous enforcement of the law against such activities, because "our whole plan is to drive that now as a segment of the [tourism] industry within the territory."

Following the successful implementation of the horse racing project, the governor said a new facility will be built on St. Croix to accommodate drag racing, which would further the events tourism sector on the island.

Mapp's announcement should come as pleasant news to the West Indian Company's (WICO) CEO Joseph Boschulte, who, in a recent all-encompassing interview with *VI Consortium*, said [St. Croix needs to find its own tourism identity](#).

"Part of the challenge right now is for St. Croix to define its identity. You don't want to have St. Thomas be a St. Croix and St. Croix be a St. Thomas," Boschulte said. "When people go on vacation, they go to seek memories and part of seeking memories is to do things that are different. So you don't want to go to three or five ports that offer the same thing."

Governor Mapp did not give a timeline as to when the horse racing projects will come online, although he said talks were already underway and that an announcement would "soon" be made.