

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Packaging St. Croix Comes to Fort Christiansvaern's Steeple Building June 16

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Residents gather at Fort Christiansvaern for Veterans Day celebrations.

ST. CROIX -- Packaging St. Croix opens its exhibit on Tuesday, June 16 in the steeple building at the Christiansted National Historic Site, according to a press release issued by the National Park Service (NPS) on Wednesday.

The opening will be from 9:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. with a short program of introductions at 9:30 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.

The exhibit will remain on display until July 10. The program "Packaging St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands" began in 2013 and is created by "Ms. V." Celeste Fahie, an educational consultant, with the NPS. The program brings creative thinking and heritage awareness to the public high schools.

The National Park Service's 2016 Centennial goal is to build a next generation of stewards that will enhance and maintain St. Croix's cultural and natural resources.

The program began with visits to St. Croix's public high schools. This year, the St. Croix Central High School and the St. Croix Educational Complex participated. During these classroom visits, "Ms. V." makes the students aware of the role the NPS plays in preserving historic and cultural resources on St. Croix. She then delves into what that history entails, and how that history has extended outside the park boundaries and beyond these shores. This year's exhibit recognizes contemporary contributors to heritage, including the students' peers, parents, teachers, businesses and others who they see as making an impact in the community and those from the past.

The student participants explore the role of St. Croix's past in shaping world history through creative expression. Students learn and understand that living on this island goes past its visual beauty of sun, sand, sea and sunsets and that they should no longer take their historical and cultural value for granted. The program tries to forge connections with existing curriculum in Virgin Islands, American and World History and to tie the knot tighter to help students develop the passion in preserving their local heritage.

"These students need to understand the importance of the contributions of the enslaved population and the free people of color who were here," said Ms. Fahie. "Many of them were artisans that built the landmarks that we recognize today as our forts, houses of government, and churches. This information helps our students, many of them of Crucian heritage and nearly all of Caribbean ancestry, to develop a higher level of self-esteem built from cultural understanding.

"Let's not forget that those who occupied this space thousands of years before the Europeans traveled here. Those students who are leaving the island like the many who have left before them can also look back, give back and still impact elsewhere."

"Ms. V." has a personal understanding of this tradition having been born in the legendary Harlem section of New York with ancestral ties to the Virgin Islands. Some of this year's project pieces focus on Virgin Islanders, especially Crucians, who impacted Harlem.

This year, V. Celeste Fahie also thanked David Goldstein, chief of interpretation and education with the NPS.

"I was invited in by Ranger Vegas to assist with tours and later handed Ranger Goldstein my proposal on Packaging St. Croix, US Virgin Islands. He saw my vision and helped advanced it to the next level. I hope the community comes in full force to see what these students have done and at the same time say thank you to David and the National Park Service."

The program's student participants are now impacting others with their end products on display in the steeple building. Viewers of the Packaging St. Croix U.S. Virgin Islands exhibit will also feel a sense of value and pride from the messages being delivered.

Teachers are encouraged to begin their classes before school closes. Parents, community and leaders are also encouraged to come see what our students have shared.

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