

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Dexter Skepple Sees Change On The Horizon For VI Youth As First 'Man Cave' Event Is Deemed Successful

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ST. CROIX -- In one corner there were young men playing video games. In the middle of the room, another group gathered having casual conversations. Others ate and watched sports on two big screen TVs to the west and east sides of the space. Notably, an older gentleman, seemingly in his 50s, could be seen talking passionately to a young man; ostensibly pouring in wisdom gleaned over the years, hoping the teen would take heed.

All this happened in one night, at Bernie's Restaurant in Peter's Rest last Thursday, the location where Pastor Dexter Skepple's vision -- a place where men (young and old) could share with each other, watch sports, sharpen one another and change lives -- will see its first strategy put to the test.

It's called "Man Cave", the idea being that the spot could work as a getaway for men who sometimes want to escape from the daily hassles of life, be it family, work or other daily responsibilities. But the effort's main vision remains in place: taking a stand in the community to be better fathers, mentors and take responsibility for the many ills affecting the islands. The Man Cave, Skepple said, is the initial step where relationships will be forged. Followup action will include making a serious, long-lasting commitment to positively impact the young men here through other means as well, with details to be unveiled in the near future.

Jamil Ali, 24, a Christian who was in deep conversation with a young man invited to the event, told The Consortium that he was surprised by the turnout, and enjoyed the men-only experience.

"This is my first time coming and it was a wonderful experience," Mr. Ali said. "I was actually shocked to see the amount of people who came. The atmosphere is very welcoming, and to just be with guys -- one set playing domino, another set watching baseball, basketball and football, and then you have the food, and of course brothers on another side playing video games -- it's really good that there are so many different things to do that everyone can just mingle."

Mr. Ali said what he enjoyed most about the Man Cave experience was that everyone appeared to be themselves, crediting an "atmosphere of freedom" for the carefree behavior.

"You could be yourself, you don't have to be uptight and it's everyone just like you getting away from kids, wives, the outside world and the church walls," he said.

And Mr. Ali, who is married, said he believes that men who come to the event and may be troubled or seeking to turn around their lives, will find that the Man Cave serves as the right blend to facilitate that desire.

"I think this is the beginning of a large thing that's going to start impacting our youth and older people, because there are a lot of guys in here who are Christians, and their characteristics will work as a positive influence for those men," Mr. Ali said. "We're not here mentioning God in every sentence; we're here to do things that men in general love: sports, talking and being yourself. And I think that's going to draw a lot of the outside crowd in, and the characteristics of Christ within the Christian men will start to spread. We're going to have fun."

At an initial event last month, Pastor Skepple said his goal was to identify a location where men could learn from each other while enjoying some sports. It would also serve to strengthen brothers and encourage them to be examples in the community.

On Thursday, Mr. Skepple, 47, said he was pleased with the first event's turnout and expected to see growth moving forward.

"This will impact the community in a great way," Mr. Skepple said. "It takes those in the community who may be thinking about doing something wrong and gives them a place to go, and also an opportunity to go in a different direction. And that's the big advantage we have."

Mr. Skepple, senior pastor of Speak the World Ministries, told The Consortium that a woman brought her grandson to the gathering because he was excited to be among other men whose only goal was to instill wisdom. The pastor then pointed to a deacon who was mentoring a young man during the function and used it as an example of what is to be expected.

"We're looking for opportunities to talk to the youth between games, fun and food. One night off the streets is one night away from potentially doing something wrong," Mr. Skepple said, pointing to three men who were at the gathering that he said could have been in trouble.

Man Cave will be held on Fridays at Bernie's Restaurant at 7:00 p.m.

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