

The Virgin Islands Consortium

With Dine VI, Nicholson-Doty Wants St. Croix To Stand Out

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Beverly Nicholson Doty

ST. CROIX -- The Consortium met with Tourism Commissioner Beverly Nicholson-Doty at one of WJKC's studios in Gallows Bay, last week. Her steady, delightful demeanor not giving away that she'd just made several stops at various radio programs promoting Dine VI earlier that morning, the week-long set of events that started yesterday with [Food Learn](#), and runs until November 8 with a diverse lineup including the Food Truck Festival, Gospel Brunch, Living Museum and [more](#).

Showing her knack for innovation and change, Mrs. Nicholson-Doty, who is on her ninth year serving as commissioner of Tourism, told this publication that the goal of Dine VI was to set St. Croix -- known for its good food -- apart from the other islands in an attempt to build sustainable tourism.

"We really believe that St. Croix has a unique opportunity to excel in the areas of culture heritage as sustainable tourism, and the culinary arts is such an important part of sustainable tourism. It allows us to connect with agriculture, so it's really a unique ability for us to take St. Croix to another level but differently," Mrs. Nicholson-Doty said.

The idea is to stand out. St. Thomas' tourism product has been well-established as an island impeccably positioned geographically, making it one of the most attractive stops from cruise lines small and large. And since the islands are so close in proximity, most ships choose to make only one stop -- with St. Thomas winning the cruise lines' commitments disproportionately. Some have argued that it's the poor marketing of this island that has been the problem; but Mrs. Nicholson-Doty sees an opportunity by shining light on St. Croix's often hidden beauty,



Department of Tourism Commissioner Beverly

Nicholson-Doty.

"We want to appreciate the fact that St. Croix is not St. Thomas, it's not St. John, but it has its own viable tourism product, and we just want to find more of the people that are going to love, enjoy, tell their friends about St. Croix and come back, and so it's really a great opportunity for us to showcase the culinary arts," the commissioner went on.

The first event, held at the Carl & Marie Lawaetz Museum, saw St. Croix youth sampling Dine VI's first set of courses, readied by Chef Frank Pugliese along with youth in 9th - 12th grade who are interested in culinary arts.

At the event, hundreds of food-related careers were discussed, and Tourism officials -- including Manager of Product Development and Sustainable Marketing Carlotta Luis -- were on hand to assure the event's seamless progression and answer questions. Department of Agriculture Commissioner Carlos Robles was also present.

The Food Learn occasion was just for starters, though. DOT will turn up the heat (pun intended) on Friday at the Frederiksted Food Truck Festival, an affair that's set to see performances by Pressure and others light up the night, flanked by a myriad of food trucks serving this island's best dishes -- all highlighting the exceptional culinary arts here.

Dine VI, according to the commissioner, serves as a testing ground for things to come. Mrs. Nicholson-Doty told The Consortium that the department was soft on promoting the event to outsiders because the idea is to gather data from the first effort and present a refined product next year. Ultimately, it will be called Restaurant Month, which will incorporate St. Thomas and St. John as well. Mrs. Nicholson-Doty said the kickoff is taking place on St. Croix because of its exceptional culinary offerings and seamless integration of the island's agriculture component.

"We really see this as an opportunity for the entire territory," she said.

And DOT has had [major media outlets](#) visiting St. Croix and writing stories about its culinary offerings in preparation of Dine VI. She said journalists are currently documenting the happenings and more will be present at the back end to tell of the experience.

"The goal is certainly to drive people here to come and visit and experience our culinary offerings, but we also know that a big part about when people travel is the question of how as part of the branding effort is get



Students participate at Dine VI's

Food Learn event yesterday.

"And we're certainly blessed by the fact that we have really great high-end restaurants here on St. Croix, but I get the most heart-warming experiences when someone goes to some place like the Cast Iron, or they go to the Chicken Shack because it means that

they really got a taste of who we are as a people.

"I believe that what people want when they travel, is to get a sense of place, and a sense of place can often be communicated through its food and its people. So when travelers are able to say, 'I had a Johnny Cake, I had some beans and rice, I had callaloo' -- they've tasted something that gives them bragging rights because their friends didn't, and so I think that food is a great connector and it's a really good opportunity for us."

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