

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Virgin Islands Delegation Invited To Cuba's 2016 Carnival For Cultural Exchange Initiative

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ST. THOMAS -- Ron Harrigan, Ed. D., president of the Virgin Islands Genealogical Society (VIGS), announced today that the government of Santiago de Cuba has extended an invitation to the Virgin Islands to participate in the 2016 Carnival festivities, a press release issued this afternoon has made known.

Harrigan, who travelled to Cuba's second largest city - Santiago de Cuba - in July with fellow Virgin Islander Lawrence R. Sewer, visited at the invitation of the Ministry of Culture in Santiago and brought a taste of Virgin Islands culture to the Santiago Carnival events this year. Both Harrigan and Sewer presented on their travel experience to an audience at the Virgin Islands Council on the Arts on October 30, 2015.

"I had attempted for years for an official visit by the VIGS to go to Cuba and trace the history of our ancestors who traveled to work in the sugar industry, however those efforts did not materialize. Instead, a friend wrote on my behalf to the Santiago Ministry of Culture for my attendance to an annual symposium during Santiago's 'Festival of Fire'," Harrigan said. He ultimately was invited to attend the 500th Anniversary of the Founding of the City of Santiago and the Annual Carnival of Santiago de Cuba.

Sewer, a local herbalist and genealogist for his own family, joined Harrigan on the 15-day tour of Cuba's cultural hub. "This is the place where African and Caribbean culture reside," said Sewer who has also traveled to Ghana. "I was able to connect with members of the Sewer family and play mas in the carnival parade. I donated my Chango mask to the carnival museum prior to leaving."

The duo visited Santiago's Carnival Museum, which houses costumes from prior festivities and are exploring ways for a similar structure to be established in the Virgin Islands. Harrigan and Sewer have been charged with organizing an official delegation of Virgin Islanders to participate in next carnival celebration to facilitate a cultural exchange between both destinations.

"There has been so much in the news about Cuba and this collaboration is an effort for us to share our culture with our brothers and sisters in Santiago de Cuba," Harrigan said. "Much attention is being paid to Havana, but there is a very rich culture there that has ties to our community and we look forward to attending next year's academic symposium, sponsored by Casa del Caribe and bringing a bit of Virgin Islands Carnival to the region."

Feature Image: A reveler pose for a picture during Cuba's Annual Carnival of Santiago de Cuba.