

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## 11th Annual Pig Roast Festival Gets A Rebirth With Younger Leadership, Renewed Focus

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ST. CROIX -- The crowds came ready to eat roasted pig. Overwhelmingly Hispanic, residents descended upon the Armapavie Ballpark, located on the Hess Road, where the 11th Annual Lechon (Pig Roast) Festival was held on Saturday.

They also came to mingle with other residents as well, those who are not of Hispanic descent but enjoy the colorful culture. It's an aspect of the event that organizers are well aware of, and one they hope to encourage as it works to strengthen ties among members of the community here, a melting pot of people from all around the Caribbean.

"The purpose of this event is to maintain the Latin culture that is unique to St. Croix. That's why the festival's committee is actually called Crucian, Latin, Caribbean Pig Roast Festival," said Jose Nieves, president of the fledgling group, who was chosen to lead the team after the original members decided to turn over the organization to a newer generation of leaders. "The event aims to tie-in all our cultures in once place," he added.

The first Lechon (Pig Roast) Festival started in La Grande Princesse 11 years ago. Its success forced a venue change and was moved to the Canegata Ball Park in Gallows Bay, Christiansted, where it remained until yesterday, according to Mr. Nieves.

The park was flanked by tents hosting 14 vendors, seven on each side, selling everything from food to ornaments. Of course, there was roasted pig, but admittedly, Mr. Nieves said the quantity was insufficient -- only four pig roasters -- as the flow of people wanting to taste the food that the Lechon Festival was built around, was incessant. "We didn't get all our pig roasters from the past, but we're hoping that next year they will join, and we expect new ones," Mr. Nieves offered.

Even with new minds at the helm, Mr. Nieves told The Consortium that while changes were made, the group decided to keep the core traditions of the festival intact.

"We implemented some new ideas, made a new logo to give the festival an identity, but the traditions remain," he said. Mr. Nieves added that the group was looking into hosting separate events throughout the year as it seeks to build a solid financial foundation, not only for future events, he said, but "to contribute to other nonprofit organizations."

And he envisions an event held on a much greater scale, and by the same token, one that encourages family bonding. "We want more interactions with the kids and parents, other than the music and the food," he said.

Dignitaries were present to show their support as well, one of the first being Sen. Novelle Francis. Later, Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett and Sen. Kenneth Gittens arrived and were seen mingling with event-goers. A mascot that entertained attendees throughout the morning, turned out to be Sen. Samuel Sanes. And Governor Kenneth, who said he's been enjoying the ongoing festivities in the territory, was also present, arriving in the afternoon and stating that, as a food lover, he could not miss such events.

"I look forward to going into the room where the domino competitions are being held to see if I could get a little game on the side," said the governor, later thanking the Lechon Committee for organizing the event, and pledging Government House's support.

As for event attendees, the food, said Marcia Alexander, was her main attraction.

"I think the atmosphere is great," she said. Ms. Alexander voiced her disappointment that there was so little food remaining; but applauded the committee's efforts for attempting to bridge the various communities here through the festival.

"In this community, there is no Hispanic or black; I think we merge well together, similarly to the [Dominican Parade](#)," she said. "We all attend and have a great time, so I think they're doing a very good job."