

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Multiple Fights End Christiansted J'ouvert; Lagoon After-Party

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ST. CROIX -- What started out as a peaceful J'ouvert Morning tramp down the town of Christiansted -- beginning at the Basin Triangle and set to climax at the Altona Lagoon in Gallows Bay -- came to a halt at Fort Christiansvaern, interrupted by a fight that ended the otherwise undisturbed gathering of people, enjoying themselves to the sounds of the Venomous Poison Band from St. Thomas, and the Fusion Band, five-time road march champions here.

The first fight broke out a few minutes after 8:00 a.m. directly across Fort Christiansvaern, seemingly among young people, as one young man wearing a white t-shirt was seen bleeding ferociously, with blood covering his nostrils. He was

accompanied by other teens as they made their way back into town. "You all always causing trouble," one of the friends yelled at the injured teen.

Police were able to swiftly quell the clash, and moved immediately to shut the event down. The officers were also attempting to halt the activities that were to follow at the Altona Lagoon, but Davidson Charlemagne, president of the Crucian Christmas Carnival Committee, successfully lobbied for the activities to continue. The trucks carrying the bands drove without music to the Lagoon, where the party was scheduled to proceed late into the afternoon.

But there, too, what appeared to be an energetic crowd of young people having a good time, quickly turned violent when yet another fight broke out. The Venomous Poizon Band had just completed its set, and yielded to the Fusion Band to takeover. The fight broke out almost immediately; and partygoers could be seen rushing to the beach area, north of the concession building situated at the northeastern part of the Lagoon. A young lady was hurried into an EMS vehicle where she was being calmed by both EMS



minutes as police worked to

Crucian Carnival Committee

President Davidson Charlemagne, right, wearing a white shirt and black hat, across from Fort Christiansvaern, where a fight had just occurred.

However, just as officers had seemingly gotten the fights under control by arresting certain individuals, another melee broke out -- again to the northeast side of the Lagoon -- causing frustrated revelers to openly express their disgust.

"People can't have a good time here anymore," a young woman said. Others echoed her vexation and people began leaving the area en mass.

The activities, set to conclude at 4:00 p.m. today, was permanently halted at about 9:40 a.m.

It was not the start to carnival that Mr. Charlemagne had envisioned. Just before the event began this morning, Mr. Charlemagne told The Consortium that he and his team were looking forward to a violence-free, fun and exciting event. He made known that a meeting was held with the VIPD where pertinent information related to J'ouvert was

shared. Mr. Charlemagne has been a strong advocate of keeping the festivities alive in the face of recent and ongoing criminal activity here, contending that a few bad people should not spoil the enjoyment of an entire community. He added that halting all carnival events would be a victory for this island's criminal element.

"The violence thing, we never worry about it because it's not in our carnival; it's not in our fete," Mr. Charlemagne said, referring to ongoing gun violence here. "As long as they keep it out there, let the good community come out and have their fun. And that's what's been happening, because nobody is scared to come out. Let us stop putting a stigma. People come out to party, and we're not allowing the criminals to control us," he concluded.

Lt. Leslie Pemberton, the commander for the VIPD's Christiansted sector in charge of safety and security of residents during J'ouvert, told The Consortium that the force had done all it could to foster a safe environment. He said the presence of officers was the VIPD's biggest defense, stating that they were strategically placed along the J'ouvert route. Lt. Pemberton also made known that he and his team briefed the bands on actions that they should take in case of violence, as well as the actions that would be initiated by the VIPD.

It was about 6:49 a.m. this morning when the bands started their trek down Christiansted. "I have a message from the police," said a Venomous Poizon band member, "the Police say if there are fights, they will stop the jam."

When the fights broke out, they did just that.