

The Virgin Islands Consortium

At Coquito Festival, Signs Of What St. Croix Longs To See

Entertainment / **Published On December 20, 2015 08:35 PM /**

Staff **December 20, 2015**



ST. CROIX -- The 8th Annual Coquito Festival held at the La Reine Chicken Shack yesterday saw unsurprisingly strong numbers. And though attendance has been traditionally dominated by residents of Latin descent, yesterday's crowd boasted a fair mix of cultures coming together to enjoy Latin heritage through music, food, and of course, coquito.

Keeping in line with its title, the festival's main attraction is a coquito competition that judges contestants on taste and presentation, with a grand prize of \$500. But according to the event's organizers, Saturday's affair represented something more: an indirect demonstration of the unity and laughter that residents here have enjoyed for a long time;

a privilege disturbed by the recent and current gun violence affecting the island.

"This is St. Croix, this is what St. Croix is supposed to be," said co-owner of La Reine Chicken Shack Robert Leguillou, pointing to the crowd of people that were dancing on the grounds of the popular restaurant to Latin music that was being played by a band from Puerto Rico. "It's not the negative that we've been having recently. Right here, if you look at the crowd, this is what we want on St. Croix."

As is custom, various dignitaries visited the festival, including Governor Kenneth Mapp, Senators Samuel Sanes, Novelle Francis, Jr and Kenneth Gittens. The leaders blended with partygoers seamlessly. They, too, dancing and sampling drinks.

In earlier years, La Reine Chicken Shack sponsored the entire affair, however, as it grew into one of the island's indelible Christmas activities, other supporters came aboard, the biggest of which, according to La Reine Chicken Shack co-owner Angel Diaz, is Bellows International.

The owners spoke of how they view the festival as a big party where residents just have fun, and revealed that there were no fees for coquito contest participants. Indeed, a quick eye assessment of the area told a story of people who came out to have a good time. Some danced while the bands played. Others recorded video as the performers serenaded the gathering. Most, however, were fixated by the entertainment and applauded periodically in approval. The event represented pockets of what this island has been known for, said Mr. Leguillou, yet finds itself wanting more of, if only to wave goodbye the criminal element that has dampen the festive mood amongst many residents.

As for coquito, event-goers could be seen at various booths tasting the lauded drink for a small price. Other vendors sold items for children, and the La Reine Chicken Shack itself, opened until the close of the party, served food and drinks, and saw one of its best days of business this year.