

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Educational Complex Marching Band At Disney World To Perform In Festival Parade

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ST. CROIX -- The St. Croix Educational Complex Marching Band left the Big Island on Wednesday and headed to Disney World in Orlando, Florida, to perform in one of the park's festival parades, and to also further enhance their skills through training.

The group -- which includes cheerleaders, dancers, majorettes and the color guard -- will participate in workshops and perform before an audience after each training. On Saturday, the dancers will do a closing performance at one of the many parks at the Orlando facility to several songs -- including some local hits -- that were choreographed by Essi Gaston-Edwards, the band's assistant director, and Simply Sophisticated Fun Troupe mastermind Shamari Hanes.

The trip is costly, Mrs. Gaston-Edwards said, costing well over \$100,000. But the community has stepped up, she added, with the Virgin Islands Lottery being the gold sponsor, and Banco Popular the silver. See all sponsors [here](#).

The group in Orlando consists of 77 students, along with chaperones and directors, with chaperones being former members of the band, or parents of former band members. Some Department of Education employees also made the trip.

"We are very much proud to say that the community has been in our favor and has been supporting us," Mrs. Gatson-Edwards said.

Chenelle Cuencas, who accompanied the band to the airport, expressed elation that her daughter was part of the team.

"I'm very excited, and so is she and the rest of the band," said Ms. Cuencas of her daughter Chaliyah Soto, captain of the band's dance squad. Ms. Cuencas also credited the band program for building her daughter's confidence.

"My daughter was very shy, and the minute she auditioned for the dance squad, she eventually became captain, and instead of being shy, she outgrew all of that and is now very confident. She does better in her schoolwork and has met a lot of people -- they are like a big family," Ms. Cuencas said.

The band will return on Sunday.