

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Community Shows Unwavering Support As Thousands Turnout To 15th Annual Relay For Life

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ST. CROIX -- Relay For Life is one of those events that you have to witness to believe: an unnumbered crowd representing all demographics of this community, gathered at the St. Croix Educational Complex track and field facility once every year in a show of support for cancer survivors so compelling that some have called it one of the biggest social events on St. Croix.

"It is one of the biggest social events all year, and it's for a great cause," said [Alvin Burke, Jr.](#), who lost his grandmother to cancer and dedicates his walk around the track to her. "Everything of Relay For Life, I love. From the organization and the support from all the different businesses, and how everyone comes together."

Saturday marked the 15th annual event here, according to Tina Beazer, interim executive director of the Virgin Islands arm of the American Cancer Society (A.C.S.).

Dozens of groups from all corners of this community -- businesses, nonprofits, government departments and agencies, the Office of the Governor and Office of the Lieutenant Governor, senators, local celebrities and commoners -- gathered at the large field, ready to walk, run, and in the process raise funds for what Ms. Beazer said remains one of the biggest killers in the Virgin Islands. She said Relay For Life, celebrating its 30th year this month, has been and continues to be an effort to bring the community together and signify hope to those who are currently fighting cancer, survivors, and as a remembrance for those who lost their battle against the disease, of which a cure remains elusive.

The interim executive director said A.C.S.'s focus has become more pointedly on prevention, noting that while a cure has not been found, knowledge gleaned from decades of research confirm that adopting preventative measures is the best way of staying cancer free. She highlighted weight as a major issue in the African American community, and advocated healthier eating habits.

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"We need to change the way that we eat. It doesn't mean that you have completely not eat what you've been brought up with, but you can modify it, you can have less portions," she said. Ms. Beazer said this is important because all the money in the world can't save someone from certain cancers, and that the disease does not discriminate between race or status in society. And she urged parents to provide healthy meals for their children. "We choose for them," she said. "They don't cook the dinners, they don't do the shopping. We teach them how to do those things everyday."

Daren Stevens, a local personality who heads Relay For Life's public relations and entertainment arms, was successful in getting the commitment of recording artists and other groups -- all who performed free of charge -- to entertain participants in the all-day affair, which spans two days. Some notables included Stanley and the Ten Sleepless Knights, the We Deh Ya Cultural Dancers, the St. Croix Educational Complex Marching Band, Tia Mason and Stylee Band, among others.

"We have dedicated entertainers here, and their appearance at Relay For Life is a show of their support for cancer survivors, and as an appreciation to my support of their careers over the years," Mr. Stevens, who also hosted the event, said.

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Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter, a regular at Relay For Life activities -- who had made 28 laps around the track when he spoke to The Consortium -- encouraged residents to eat healthy and exercise. He also praised the event.

"I just think Relay For Life is an excellent event," he said. "I like the concept of trying to raise funds to help eradicate cancer in our own home. And I just believe that if you can move, if you have life and you are healthy, you should go out and do whatever you can to make this effort that will be hugely successful for those that have survived, and those, unfortunately, who may fall ill."

This year's Relay For Life was meticulously organized. A sea of volunteers traversed back and forth assuring smooth operation. Survivors, Relay For Life's most looked-after group, were constantly tended to, and sat in a dedicated area where meals were served. The event started on time and stayed on schedule throughout the day and into the night. While entertainers performed, a variety of groups walked the track, a powerful statement that continued well into Sunday morning. Even the children were considered by the organizers, as inflatable bouncers were stationed at the north side of the field, where they played.

And everyone that The Consortium spoke with echoed the same lines: support of survivors and those who lost their lives were the reasons for their support. They mentioned either a family member or friend who had successfully battled the disease, or succumbed to it.

About 9:30 p.m., a luminary ceremony was held where candles were lit all around the track and on the bleachers, in remembrance of those who lost their battle with cancer and in honor of survivors. The ceremony was followed by a second survivors' walk, the first taking place during the afternoon.

Activities are ongoing at the St. Croix Educational Complex track and field facility, and includes events such as a church service at 8:00 a.m., a raffle and more.