

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Reading Challenge Books To Come Alive During Children's Parade

Culture / **Published On December 23, 2016 10:46 PM /**

Staff **December 23, 2016**



ST. CROIX -- The Virgin Islands Department of Education Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education is bringing literacy, culture and creativity to St. Croix's Children's Parade on January 6, D.O.E. announced today. The division will debut one-of-a-kind giant and movable papier-mâché puppets that depict the animals and characters of popular books from the 2015 and 2016 Governor's Summer Reading Challenge.

The idea of bringing books to life for carnival is the brainchild of Education Commissioner Sharon-Ann McCollum. "I truly believe reading should be fun and educational for our students and they should be able to connect books with their life inside and outside of school," Ms. McCollum said. "This troupe brings the characters to life in a way students

could interact with them at one of our most important cultural events, the Children's Parade."

Ms. McCollum presented the concept of using the books of the widely popular and successful Governor's Summer Reading Challenge because the characters are easy to identify and they were written by local and Caribbean authors.

Several puppeteers were contacted who create moveable puppets similar to those seen on the Lion King Broadway show. Hand Puppet Intervention, a puppet theater company located in North Carolina, was a perfect match for Ms. McCollum's vision. Hand Puppet Intervention founder and director Donovan Zimmerman was sent samples of the selected books and characters, and in November he gladly took up a two-week residency in St. Croix to share his craft with art teachers and students. Mr. Zimmerman was also very excited to work on a carnival project in the Caribbean, the first for his company.

Creation of the giant puppets was held at the St. Croix Educational Complex (SCEC) under the supervision of Valrica Bryson, director of Cultural Education, with the guidance of SCEC art teacher Danica Davis. SCEC students constructed the puppets, while Mr. Zimmerman was responsible for the sculpting and painting. Mr. Zimmerman also taught the students and teachers how to operate and care for the puppets. Smaller puppet characters were created by students across the St. Croix district under the supervision of their art teachers who attended sessions with Mr. Zimmerman.

In an effort to support local businesses, materials used to create the giant papier-mâché puppets were purchased on St. Croix at stores, such as Divi Divi Fabrics, Home Depot, K-Mart and The Frame-Up. Most of the cardboard and newspapers used for the project were donated by the St. Croix Avis and other local businesses.

The Department of Education's anti-litter mascot, Squeaky, will also make its debut at the parade.