

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Caribbean Cinemas Grand Opening Hailed As Bright Spot For St. Croix

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ST. CROIX -- [A week ago](#), the untrained eye would have thought the task of opening the new Caribbean Cinemas in the Sunny Isle Annex in four days an impossible feat, because of the amount of work needed to be done.

But on Thursday evening, the facility welcomed a host of special invited guests, among them Governor Kenneth Mapp and other government officials, to experience what has been dubbed a state-of-the-art movie theater, among the best in the Caribbean right here on St. Croix.

The facility, which cost over \$10 million to construct and was funded through Banco Popular, serves as a bright spot for St. Croix and the wider U.S.V.I., according to local officials. The grand opening also comes at a time when the Government of the Virgin Islands continues to reel from a financial crisis.

Caribbean Cinemas President Lorraine Carrady, said during her talk that the grand opening represents an important and proud milestone for their company. And she acknowledged the former owners, the family of the late David Brown, who she said holds equity share in the new cinema. Mr. Browne operated two theaters in Sunny Isle under the trade name "First Run Films" for many years, Ms. Carrady said. She revealed that the old theater will be renovated, redesigned and be used for office space.

Ms. Carrady said the new cinema would not be possible without the large construction team from the territory headed by Jimmy Breunlin of Breunlin construction, as well as other subcontractors and suppliers including Eleven Construction and Spartan Concrete, PG Electric, Quality Electric, OTL Mechanical, General Plumbing, Alarmco, Rooftops, Glass 2000, and Energy Wise Solutions.

And she thanked the Economic Development Authority and its EDC program, through which tax breaks are given that makes the territory more attractive for such major development opportunities. E.D.A. Acting C.E.O. Wayne Biggs said investment, job opportunities and a stable tax base are the pillars that support economic development, noting that the new cinema represented all of the above.

"I want to thank the Carradys for putting this project to fruition because it improves all our quality of life in the territory, and it's something else we can offer here in the territory," Mr. Biggs said.

Citing EDA estimates that for every dollar spent in economic development, four times the amount in economic activity is produced, Mr. Mapp said the new cinema had already produced \$40 million worth of economic activity. "This is a wonderful, wonderful addition to the business community in St. Croix, and we're grateful," the governor said. He offered his continued support to the Carradys.

Mr. Mapp also said that the economy was picking up, despite the financial crisis facing the government.

"We have challenges, but when we tell you the economy is growing and expanding, and particularly on the island of St. Croix, we're not making it up," he said. "You're going to be able to see over the next course of weeks and months in 2017, significant additional growth and expansion of jobs and investment on the island of St. Croix."

Caribbean Cinemas, based in Puerto Rico, has a Caribbean-wide operation, with theaters in many of the islands, including Guadeloupe, Aruba, Guyana, Panama, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, St. Martin, Trinidad, Antigua and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The company has 31 cinemas in Puerto Rico, and 16 in the Dominican Republic.

According to Noelia Alsina, sales and marketing coordinator for the Eastern Caribbean, Aruba and Guyana, the company's USVI cinema business has been a profitable venture, which prompted investment. She said the facility on St. Thomas will soon be renovated, easing concerns of St. Thomians who felt neglected in light of the new St. Croix facility.

The biggest new development, however, is the ability to buy tickets online. Ms. Alsina said the service will be available “a few weeks” after the grand opening, as the system needs to be installed and programmed. “You purchase the ticket online, and you come here to our cinema express booth and put in a code, and your ticket will be produced,” she said.

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