

The Virgin Islands Consortium

V.I. Culture Bearers Boost Celebrations Of USVI History Month At Local Schools

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ST. CROIX -- St. Croix's culture bearers and musicians joined students as they celebrate the tradition and history of the Virgin Islands during the month of March. From a large pot of homemade kallaloo to the modeling of cultural wear and headdresses, culture was alive at the Elena Christian and John H. Woodson junior high schools, as well as the Juanita Gardine Elementary School and St. Croix Central High School.

Elena Christian's Cultural Day on Tuesday, March 14, titled, "A Blast From the Past, 10 Decades of Our Culture" drew support from community members, such as storyteller Jahmilia Greenway, We Deh Yah Dancers and Pat Browne, who demonstrated how to tie a headdress. There was Cariso singing, steel pan playing, fire dancing, mocko jumbie

performances and a cultural wear fashion show as part of the affair. The youthful Sweet Peppa and Mini Peppa Quelbe bands took the celebration to a vibrant finale, providing music for the school's Quadrille and Maypole dancers.

A Virgin Islands History Month Centennial Program was held at the Juanita Gardine Elementary School on Wednesday, March 15, titled, "Our Lives, Our Culture--Celebrating 100 Years in the Virgin Islands of the United States of America." The sounds of the St. Croix Central High School's Conch Shell Blowers guided by DeJesus Espinosa echoed through the school's auditorium, triggering a spark of cultural excitement that permeated throughout the celebration. Student performances took center stage with poetry, skits, steel pan playing and Quadrille dancing. The school's original centennial song, "100 Years," made the spotlight as 6th graders belted out the lyrics to music teacher Otis Gibbs' composition. A masquerading presentation by cultural bearers of the art form held students in awe as they enjoyed Virgin Islands' traditions real time. The masqueraders were Joan Paulus, Mirza Saldana, Asta Williams and Sonia Griles.

A Taste of (John H.) Woodson on Thursday, March 16 brought students and visitors to the school's courtyard to sample food that teased their cultural appetite, while the school's Maypole and steel pan provided entertainment. They relished local tarts, candies and cakes prepared by La-Verne Y. Bates; and pates, shish kabobs and beverages served by members of the school's clubs and other vendors.

St. Croix Central High School Social Studies Department didn't let up on its observance of Virgin Islands History Month. Teachers went all out to ensure that students had a fun-filled day while getting a solid grip of their rich cultural heritage. The school's cultural presentation at the stage in the front lawn on Friday, March 17 titled, "Learning from the Past and Preparing for Our Future," saw performances from several school and community groups, such as the Filipino Dancers.

The elementary school most represented at the high school cultural affair was Ricardo Richards, which brought out Masqueraders, African Dancers and a presentation of the "Historical Timeline of the Virgin Islands." The community-based Ay-Ay Quadrille dancers set the pace for Quadrille groups from the St. Croix Educational Complex and St. Croix Central High to follow. Mocko jumbies danced high above spectators. The gregarious and omnipresent Stanley and the Sleepless Knights provided live music for most of the performances.

St. Croix Festival 2017 Calypso Champion Temisha Libert, popularly known as "Caribbean Queen," enlightened the students with strong lyrics from her winning compositions. Musical performances by individuals and groups, such as the CHS Jazz Band and the popular Stylee Band closed out the day of cultural awareness at the St. Croix Central High School.

Feature Image: We Deh Yah Dancers for a pic. (Credit: Dept. of Education)