

The Virgin Islands Consortium

A Taste Of St. Croix Keeps Its Flavor -- And Its Vision For Sustainable Farming

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ST. CROIX -- Lauded as the culmination of food and wine events on the island, the 17th Annual Taste of St Croix brought thousands to Divi Carina Bay Resort and Casino on Thursday night. The premier showcase of culinary artistry and excellence brought local restaurants—both long established and up and coming—to the forefront, allowing them an opportunity to compete, but more importantly show off their craft and achieve the overall goal of Taste. Eight Wine and Beverage vendors and fifty-two restaurants participated in the event.

Over the years, Taste of St Croix has been considered a prestigious, go-to event the year, pulling visitors and eventgoers from all over the territory, Caribbean and the United

States. Its effect is so far-reaching that even local stores outside of the restaurant business, farming, and hospitality experience an increase in patronage as persons prepare for the event. In effect, it has become synonymous with elegance and exquisite culinary.

However, during a press conference before the event, Kelly Odom, co-founder of Taste of St Croix, said despite being considered the largest culinary party on the island, the intent of Taste is to achieve sustainable farming on the island, and in greater part the territory. She says the goal is to ensure that products being used in restaurants on the island come from our farms and our waters, so that nothing is frozen but always fresh. They hope to achieve this by, “[showcasing] the diverse and delectable cuisine and culture of St Croix with its influences from all over the Caribbean and world,” as quoted from the Taste of St Croix website.

Ms. Odom touched on the success of the first event to kick off Taste—Farmer’s Market—saying she was happy to see more and more local farmers participating, adding that she hopes to see more farms and more school gardens participating in the event, and more local products being used around the island. This sparked some discussion among the judges who reminisced on a time when St. Croix was considered “the bread basket of the Caribbean”; whereas now it imports approximately 97% percent of its food. “The goal is to get us back to that point,” said Ms. Odom.

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Another one of the goals, which she said Taste of St Croix has accomplished, is bringing Virgin Islands talent to a wider audience. According to Ms. Odom, through the event, she’s seen a few first-time participants, up-and-coming chefs, and restaurants gain acclaim and flourish.

Also speaking at the press conference was Kemit-Amon Lewis of Reef Responsible, who is working on creating a sustainable seafood community within the territory. He said the goal of the nonprofit agency is to protect the reefs and still provide locally caught seafood by teaching local fishermen how to fish seasonal catch, while simultaneously educating restaurateurs on different methods to identify fresh product and preparation of other none traditional seafood products used locally. As he said, one of their initiatives is teaching restaurants how to safely prepare lionfish, which are overpopulating and killing the reefs.

Reef Responsible currently works with 19 local restaurants: Savant; Dashi; Twin City Coffee House; Café Christine; The Mermaid at Buccaneer; Kendrick’s at Buccaneer; Empress Fresh Foods; Above the Cliff; Rhythms at Rainbow; Ital in Paradise; La Reine Chicken Shack; Baked Café; Shoreline at Chenay Bay; Zion Modern Kitchen; J&V Diner; Un Amore; Kaza House; and Umami Catering.

Taste of St Croix is comprised of several events over a weeklong period, which are:

- Farmers Market held on April 3rd, 2017
- SeeFood Sustainably Conservation Conversation held on April 4th, 2017
- Taste of the Town held on April 5th, 2017
- Taste of St Croix help on April 6th, 2017
- School Lunch Makerover held on April 7th, 2017

- Taste Buds held on April 8th, 2017
- Cuisine on the Green held on April 9th, 2017

Categories and Winners:

Appetizers:

1st Place-Sandcastle on the Beach

2nd Place- Misfit Island Munchies

3rd Place (Tie) - Brew STX and 40 Strand Street

Entrée:

1st Place-Lyric Sails

2nd Place- Chef Aaron Catering

3rd Place (Tie) – Cibone

Soup and Stew:

1st Place- Sai Gon Deli

2nd Place- Divi Carina Bay Resort

3rd Place – Rowdy Joe's Northshore

Local Fare:

1st Place-Ridge to Reef Farm

2nd Place- La Reine Chicken Shack

3rd Place – Blue Water Terrace

Vegetarian:

1st Place-Nidulari

2nd Place- Ridge to Reef Farm

3rd Place – Ra's Sunrise Daughter Stand Farm

Dessert:

1st Place-Sweet Bites

2nd Place- Palms at Pelican Cove

3rd Place – Eat at Cane Bay

Beverage:

1st Place-Bes Craft Cocktail Lounge

2nd Place- Zion Modern Kitchen

3rd Place – Crucian Ice

Best Presentation:

1st Place-Savor St Croix

Honorable Mention: Doughboy Pretzels

People's Choice: Bes Craft Cocktail Lounge

The Founders Taste of St Croix extends their appreciation to volunteers, farmers, restaurateurs, sponsors, media, and of course the patrons and supporters of the event. A special congratulations to all the winners.

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