

The Virgin Islands Consortium

65 Years Later, Carnival Remains An Indelible Part Of V.I. Fabric

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ST. CROIX -- It was around 4:00 a.m. on Thursday morning, but Veterans Drive -- beginning from the Banco Popular headquarters here -- was already alive with Soca music and thousands of Virgin Islanders, who woke up early to participate in the V.I. Carnival's J'ouvert Morning celebration.

Beginning with the territory's biggest j'ouvert troupe, kaleidoscope, with its 1,300 members this year, participants set aside cares for a moment, lit up the early morning with glowing sticks, and reveled in the freedom of music and dancing -- as big trucks with deejays local and abroad served up the Soca tracks. That vibe continued past the Fire Station near the Legislature for most groups late Thursday morning.

Participants hailed from around the world -- most of them traveling from the mainland to be home for the festivities. The event also represented an ever-changing Virgin Islands, as peoples from various nations continue to move here, bringing along with them their own culture to mesh with the melting pot of races and traditions that make up the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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The Children's Parade took place on Friday, and it has been hailed by many as one of the best in years, especially with attendance, as residents turned out in respectable numbers to support.

There were over 30 entries, with groups territory-wide bringing their best performances to Main Street. Onlookers, including local dignitaries, cheered the children on as they performed. Many managed to wow the audience, but the Department of Education took the excitement to another level with its floats, with themes surrounding cultural education, agriculture and sports. Life-sized characters from books featured in the Governor's Summer Reading Challenge were highlighted prominently, and the D.O.E.'s anti-litter mascot, Squeaky, made its official debut.

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Governor Kenneth Mapp and other local officials were interviewed by The Consortium during the company's live broadcast, and they all expressed satisfaction with the Children's Parade. Lieutenant Governor Potter, whose idea it was to move the horse races to a separate day from the Children's Parade, spoke of his delight with Friday's event.

By Saturday, with an overcast sky, the Adults Parade began after 10:00 a.m. and continued until 8:00 p.m. -- one of the longest Adults Parade on record. There were approximately 55 troupes, according to information provided by the Carnival Committee, making their way up to the main square with repeat performances for attendees who lined the long parade route.

The event, in its 65th year, is an indelible part of the fabric of the Virgin Islands, according to Senate President Myron Jackson. He spoke to The Consortium briefly about the importance of Carnival to the people of the territory, deeming it part of the people's identity and heritage.

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And there was no shortage of heritage and culture on display as troupe after troupe entered the main square. The colors were vibrant and festive, the women and men radiant in costumes that grabbed the attention of onlookers.

This year's carnival saw some controversy, as some of the territory's most prominent artists were not part of Carnival Village activities. The Carnival Committee, which had [planned on charging a fee](#) for the first time in history, [abandoned the idea](#) after failing to prove to the Senate and some first responder agencies that it had taken adequate steps to secure the area with its fencing plan. And media companies expressed their displeasure after being asked to pay a fee of over \$300 per night to carry official carnival

events (the Calypso and Queen shows among them), live.

But all in all, the 65th V.I. Carnival -- with a variety of other events organized by promoters -- was memorable, with thousands visiting St. Thomas to be part of the festivities. The people we spoke with all expressed the pleasure that comes with being home, seeing family and friends, and enjoying the territory's most enduring celebration.

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