

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Millin Young To Introduce Legislation Honoring Paradise Jam Founder

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ST. THOMAS -- Senator Janette Millin Young has expressed excitement regarding Governor Mapp's Friday announcement about the collaboration between the Virgin Islands Government and Basketball Travelers Inc., stating that the announcement came only days before she introduces legislation honoring the founder of the organization, Nels J. Hawkinson.

On Friday, the governor announced that the USVI had been approved as a destination to host National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I teams and, in addition to hosting basketball, volleyball and swimming events, the territory can facilitate the participation of soccer, lacrosse and other NCAA-sponsored sports during the summer

months.

The approved games are a new partnership with Basketball Travelers Inc., which runs the successful Paradise Jam tournament in the territory, and will be called summer Paradise Jam, according to Mr. Hawkinson.

"I am pleased with Mr. Hawkinson and the work he has accomplished on behalf of the territory for almost twenty years," Mrs. Millin Young said. "It is for this reason that I have sponsored legislation to bestow the key to the territory to him."

According to Mrs. Millin Young, Paradise Jam has grown since its inception, bringing NCAA level collegiate men and women's basketball teams to compete in games at the University of the Virgin Islands and shown to millions via national broadcasts. The tournament has introduced thousands to the territory's sport-hosting capabilities, culture and amenities, as well as provided volunteer opportunities for local students, Mrs. Millin Young said.

"Sports tourism in the Virgin Islands is on its way to becoming a real and profitable component of the territory's overall tourism industry and this is in part due to Mr. Hawkinson's efforts," she added.

The approval was also hailed by Mr. Mapp.

"With all 24 NCAA Division I sports teams now able to travel to the U.S. Virgin Islands for summer tours, we look forward to being part of the growth of the Paradise Jam competitions and to the possibility of hosting other NCAA sporting events," he said, recognizing the potential for a significant positive impact on the territory's economy. "This is an amazing opportunity to expand our sports tourism portfolio and our facilities."

The announcement follows successful lobbying that saw the territory, in the case of NCAA, being viewed as a foreign destination, said Mr. Hawkinson. Previously, the territory was viewed as part of the U.S. (which it is), but the NCAA teams are allowed to travel and play outside the U.S. once every four years, and in order to qualify, it was important that the USVI be deemed a foreign destination.

Mrs. Millin Young spoke of the importance of recognizing members of the community for their efforts to grow the territory's economy.

"It is important that we recognize those within our community who have and continue to work on bringing new visitors to our shores and boosting our economy. Paradise Jam has become one of the key events that both local sports fans and those from the mainland look forward to every year," she said.

In learning of the senator's sponsorship of this legislation, Mr. Hawkinson spoke on his inspiration, saying, "This is a place in the world where I can make a difference."

Mrs. Millin Young originally intended to introduce this bill during the legislative session that was scheduled for May 23, but the meeting was canceled. It will be heard on Wednesday.

"This newest collaboration that was announced is yet another example of Mr. Hawkinson's contributions to our sports tourism industry," Mrs. Millin Young said.

