

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Virgin Islanders Encouraged To Celebrate French Heritage Week

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Senate President Myron Jackson in a release issued Thursday encouraged Virgin Islanders to join in the celebration of French Heritage Week and Bastille Day.

“We recognize the many accomplishments and the integral role the French-Caribbean community has played in the development of Virgin Islands society, particularly with regard to the agricultural and fishing industries,” Mr. Jackson said. “Specialized arts such as basket-weaving, carnival, quadrille and cuisine with French influence have contributed to the culture of the Virgin Islands and the wider Caribbean region.”

The weeklong holiday began July 8 and continues to July 14, culminating in Bastille Day, a day marking the event in 1789 when the people of France rose up against King Louis XVI, leading to the establishment of a new popular government. Bastille Day is celebrated as a national holiday in France.

The French community has a long history in the territory, dating back to the 1600s. France remained in control of the island of St. Croix from 1650 until the island was purchased by Denmark in 1733. A later wave of French immigrants from St. Barthelemy – popularly known as St. Barths, arrived on St. Thomas from the 1800s into the 1900s, settling in the two major areas of Northside and Carenage – which was the original name of Frenchtown.

Today, the territory's population is also made up of citizens who come from French-speaking islands such as St. Lucia, Haiti, St. Martin, and Dominica, as well as countries in West Africa such as Senegal and Sierra Leone.

"I urge all residents to recognize and participate in the various events held in honor of French Heritage Week, from the pageants, dancing, and music, to the theatrical presentations and fishing tournaments," Mr. Jackson said. "It is also worth paying a visit to the French Heritage Museum, which contains a wealth of artifacts and other historical documents that speak to the legacy and social and cultural history of our residents and Virgin Islanders of French heritage in these islands."

Feature Image: The french flag, colors red, white and blue, is seen center right at a historic site in the USVI.