

The Virgin Islands Consortium

They Came For The Coconut And Left Enlightened At St. Croix's 2nd Annual Coconut Festival

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ST. CROIX -- The 2nd Annual Coconut Festival, held at the Estate Bethlehem Plantation on St. Croix across from the V.I. National Guard complex, saw what organizers described as strong turnout on Sunday, with residents coming out to sample food made from the fruit, while being pleased by local entertainment, including dance, steel pan and solo selections.

The estate was lined with vendors selling everything from the expected fried foods to coconut popcorn, although there was a lack of products made out of coconut. Inside the facility's main building, a number of groups offered a variety of services, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the St. Croix Foundation and others.

Organized by St. Croix Farmers in Action (F.I.A.), the event's purpose is to educate not only the U.S. Virgin Islands, but also the Caribbean region on the many benefits and uses of coconut, according to F.I.A.



"I think we often see this fruit as just another thing in our backyard, and yet there's so much value from the top of our heads, tips of our hair to the tips of our toes -- nutritional and otherwise, and we just want the community to be more sensitive to that and the value of it, and how they can incorporate it into their everyday lives," said Yvette Ross Edwards, event coordinator.

Along with its goal of education, F.I.A. also plans on restoring the Bethlehem grounds, whose function once complete will be to "introduce to the Caribbean region a unique

heritage of eco tourism, and an agriculture museum concept," Ms. Edwards said of the future complex to be built on the 40-acre estate.



Last year's event rained out, though Ms. Edwards said F.I.A. viewed it as a success because had it not been for the rain, turnout would have been stronger. This year, F.I.A. expanded the effort by bringing a number of organizations on board, including the University of the Virgin Islands, the St. Croix Foundation and even some horsemen.

And relative to the product on which the festival was based, Ms. Ross said there were a number of educational workshops during yesterday's event that focused on coconut.

"You should be learning everything from A-Z, she said. "We started out our workshops with learning the nutritional value of the coconut, and how the coconut can be

incorporated into an everyday healthy lifestyle. And then we took it over to cooking," she went on. "So now you know how to incorporate it into your lifestyle; how can you bring it into your kitchen and make it part of your deserts, part of your fruit -- your drinks," she said. There was also a workshop that focused on the cycle of the coconut," Ms. Edwards made known.

With the event experiencing year-on-year growth, F.I.A. expects to host its 3rd annual affair next year, hopefully including more vendors who produce coconut products, which would help the festival better live up to its name.

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