

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Homicide At Village Mars Otherwise Incident-Free Festival Season

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Ernice Gilbert **January 07, 2018**



ST. CROIX -- Less than an hour before a shooting incident at the St. Croix Festival Village on Saturday night left a 31-year-old man dead, Davidson Charlemagne, the Festival Committee's chairman, spoke with The Consortium about how successful this season had been, pointing to strong turnout and an incident-free two weeks that served as stress relief to Virgin Islanders, most of whom suffered loss from Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Indeed, the Festival Village was dubbed the "Irmaria Stress Free Zone", and for the two weeks of entertainment that began in earnest on December 27, it was just that.

Even J'ouvert Morning, where skirmishes and outright fights have been known to breakout, was not undone by violence. And Saturday's combined Children and Adults

Parade was very successful and saw one of the largest turnouts in years. From about 1:00 p.m., parade royalties came in first, followed by performances from the children's parade, and later the adults parade, with mainstay troupes like Simply Sophisticated and Regal Dynasty wowing the thousands of onlookers, as well as local dignitaries at the judges' stand -- dancing to local music while wearing dazzling costumes. "It was one of the best I've ever seen," Mr. Charlemagne had told The Consortium.

But about 45 minutes after the conversation, a man was shot multiple times in his back at the Village and later died at the Juan F. Luis Hospital, according to Police Commissioner Delroy Richards. This reporter was in the Village -- along with thousands of other Virgin Islanders and visitors -- when the man, who is not being identified in this story because next of kin had not yet to been notified, was shot.

At about 10:45 p.m., a crowd of people in the Village started running chaotically in multiple directions, making known that something had gone wrong, although most people were not yet sure exactly what. Local Soca artist Nikki Brooks was performing her set when the incident occurred and moved to halt her performance. The 31-year-old was shot when the crowd started to frantically disperse, according to Mr. Richards, who told The Consortium that the killing followed an altercation over a gambling game called "Hi-Lo", at the section of the Village with the rides for children and other entertainment and games. During the altercation, one of the two individuals involved pulled out a silver revolver and shot the now deceased victim multiple times in his back.

Most people in the Village were unaware of what had occurred, and it appeared that the entertainment would continue after police had gotten the situation under control (Mr. Richards said a determination had already been made to shut down activities). But roughly 12 minutes or so later, an armada of people came stampeding from the back -- this reporter even got trampled -- as people were running for their lives, fearing the incident had escalated. According to witnesses, someone who appeared to have known the victim and was either a good friend or relative, came rushing to the area of the Village where the shooting happened after hearing of the incident, which people at the Village interpreted as an escalation.

The scene was extremely chaotic; children and parents were separated, some people were outright trampled, and those who didn't scatter in several directions went on the ground hoping to escape any gunshot that could have been fired. One child, visibly shaken, held on to a complete stranger underneath a small table at a video production tent. And adults were calling for family members who were suddenly unaccounted for following the chaos.

Moments later, people started heading for the parking lot as they rushed to get out of the Village.

It was the second time in two years that international Soca artist Destra Garcia's performance was either canceled before it began or cut short by shooting incidents in the Virgin Islands -- both incidents unrelated to the actual entertainment. In 2016, [three men were shot](#) in the St. Thomas Carnival Village while Ms. Garcia was performing, with one succumbing to his injuries. On Saturday, Ms. Garcia was set to perform, along with another international Soca artist known as Kes and the Band. Their performances were supposed to be two of the bigger highlights of this year's festival season, bringing the

events to a grand finale. The Festival Committee spent tens of thousands of dollars for these artists and their bands -- along with a chartered flight costing over \$10,000 -- as well as lodging expenses. Easily over \$50,000 could have been spent for Ms. Garcia and Kes and the band.

Police made an arrest related the first incident in the wee hours of Sunday morning, according to the commissioner. He said officers arrested Angel Parrilla, Jr., who is in his early twenties, at his residence in the Walter I.M. Hodge Housing Community.

The first shooting incident was one of two that occurred on Saturday night, according to Mr. Richards. The second occurrence, which police "strongly believe" is connected to the first, happened while a man was leaving the Village with his children in a vehicle and was ambushed. His vehicle was riddled with bullets with what Mr. Richards said was an automatic weapon such as an AK-47.

The man then sped off in a southerly direction, abandoning the vehicle at the Claude O. Markoe school, Mr. Richards said. Moments later, someone called the 911 emergency call center to report that two children, 4 and 5, sustained gunshot wounds to the stomach. They were transported to the Juan F. Luis Hospital and are said to be in stable but serious condition. The father was grazed in the head and shot in the hand, according to Mr. Richards.

"We are trying to determine suspect or suspects and so we're coming in this morning to do the followup on that," Mr. Richards said in regards to the second shooting. "Police were up all night looking for suspects in both cases. We are also looking for persons of interest in the second shooting."

These shootings marred an otherwise safe and enjoyable festival season. Even police were happy with their performance until the two last occurrences. "We were so confident in a sense that everything went so well. We had all the coverage and additional officers were in the Village last night because we knew that it was the last night and a lot of people were in the Village," Mr. Richards said. He said a scuffle between a boyfriend and girlfriend at the Village in the afternoon was quickly quelled by officers.

On the shooting incident in the Village, the commissioner said officers were on the scene "within seconds," and were pursuing leads offered by witnesses. "The guy took off his shirt and ran in a southern direction," Mr. Richards said of the suspect. "Officers were looking for him but also applying first aid to the guy on the ground and conducted interviews and came up with a suspect."

The deceased man was initially revived by emergency medical technicians on the scene, giving rise to hope that he would survive. But he succumbed to his injuries at J.F.L.