

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Nels Hawkinson, Founder Of Paradise Jam, Awarded Keys To The Virgin Islands

VIC News / **Published On January 27, 2018 11:07 AM /**

Staff **January 27, 2018**



????????????????????????????????????????

ST. THOMAS -- Nels Hawkinson, founder of Paradise Jam, was honored with the Keys to the Virgin Islands award during a ceremony at the Earl B. Ottley Legislature here on Friday, after a resolution [introduced by Senator Janette Millin Young](#) in May of last year was narrowly approved in November by lawmakers.

"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 when she introduced the

measure. "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, she added.

"Nels is special to us because this is his home. When Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria hit the territory in September, Nels hosted Paradise Jam in Virginia with the U.S. Virgin Islands painted on the courts. The athletes wore basketball uniforms that stated VI Strong. That presentation shows Nels' commitment," she said on Friday.

Senate President Myron Jackson presented the key and perma-plaque copy of Resolution No. 1841 to Mr. Hawkinson. Also present was Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Beverly Nicholson-Doty, who represented the governor.

"Nels has seventeen years of investment into the development of sports tourism in the Virgin Islands both nationally and internationally," Mr. Jackson said. "The influence of Paradise Jam cultivates young people, and that is very important. The Virgin Islands has developed athletes on regional levels despite not having adequate sports facilities."

Commenting on receiving the award, Mr. Hawkinson said, "Looking at the key, I can't even hold it. I am not about getting awards but giving them. Virgin Islanders have been resilient after experiencing two hurricanes. The one point I want to stress today is I am encouraged by yourselves and your resiliency. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and he will direct your path."

According to a blurb on the organization's [About](#) page, "Since the tournament's inception in 2000, many of the nation's finest mens and womens teams have converged on St. Thomas to test their skills and enjoy some fun in the sun. Since 2001, the tournament has been played at the 4,000-seat UVI Sports and Fitness Center. The first year of the tournament was played at Ivanna Eudora Kean High School, in anticipation of the completion of the state-of-the-art UVI facility in 2001."