

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VI Carnival Opens 'Judy's Gypsyville Village' With Resilience In Mind

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ST. THOMAS -- Friday night marked the start of Carnival in St. Thomas with the opening of the "Judy's Gypsyville Village" and a slate of performances for the night. The evening begin with DJ Malie and the opening ceremonies, followed by Milo's Kings. Much of the night was filled with dancing and festive costumes.

The Gypsies themselves entered the parking lot wearing bright red shirts and headscarves, and played tambourines during a mini parade behind Judy Watson, the night's honoree.

Governor Kenneth Mapp presented Watson with a plaque, flowers, a solid gold St. Croix-made pendant representing the Virgin Islands with beautiful artwork by St. John artist Livy Hitchcock. He shared fond memories about his long-standing personal relationship with Watson's family.

Lt. Governor Potter, Virgin Islands Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, Senate President Myron Jackson and V.I. Police Department Commissioner Delroy Richards, Sr. also made presentations.

"You've been around a long time and you have celebrated our culture for many years," Mr. Mapp said. "We see the generational movement of the young Gypsies to the older and it's still going strong. To Judy, the rest of the Watson family and the Gypsies, I say congratulations and thank you for being rock solid traditionalists and holding up Virgin Islands culture to the highest esteem. It's an honor that's well deserved."

Ms. Watson has chaired the Gypsy Troupe since 2012. Her parents, Aracely and Gerard, were instrumental in organizing the first revived carnival and participating as Gypsies since 1952. "Many people ask us how we have managed to stay together so long and the truth is, when you join the Gypsy Troupe, you become part of the Gypsy family," she said, according to Government House. "Everyone knows each other, you don't just pick up your costume and that's it."

Deh Zone Band brought the energy last night with an almost psychedelic performance, mixing local genres, Soca, and introducing influences of rock and hip-hop to create a truly unique style not seen at the Village in past years. The music resonated with the crowd and was coupled with dancing locals, tourists and prominent figures in the community.

"It been a couple months after the storms and now we're here having fun and just enjoying ourselves," said Eudroa Kean High School senior and the 2018 Carnival Queen Jikelle Michael. "My message to all Virgin Islanders is to enjoy Carnival to the fullest. Just dance your stress away, enjoy, party, drink safely, and eat because you never know what could change."

Deh Zone Band will also be performing at the Food Fair on April 25 alongside Spectrum Band at Emancipation Gardens.

The final set was performed by the Original Burning Flames. The band's presence drew a larger crowd leading up to the end of the evening, with many onlookers nostalgic about its discography and timeless tunes. Residents were noticeably excited for the band, who's origins trace back to Antigua.

Band members Toriano "Onyan" Edwards, David Edwards, Clarence "Oungku" Edwards, and Rone "Foxx" Watkins ended the night with musical renditions that encouraged some onlookers to dance while other swayed in seats with beverages.

Ms. Plaskett, who flew in from Washington D.C. on Friday to mark the start of the festivities with Virgin Islanders and will be spending some of her time in St. Croix and heading back to St. Thomas to enjoy J'ouvert and both parades next week.

With the territory still recovering and repairing infrastructure after the 2017 Atlantic Hurricane season, work in Congress has pressed on for her and other lawmakers. “I hope that we’re the premiere island in the Caribbean and other Caribbean islands look to us in terms of our festivals, our ability to do alternative energy, our ability to have really smart education in terms of technology, and also our economy; with us really being the place and a hub for all the activity in the Caribbean,” Ms. Plaskett said.

“keeping our culture alive” and the essence of our celebrations helps us to connect with one another and build our communities,” she added.

The Virgin Islands Lottery hosted a special booth on Friday evening for visitors. At the center of the Village, Lottery personnel made charging stations available for residents and offered exclusive status in their VIP section for individuals who purchased a book of tickets.

Saturday night will see performers like DJ Kevy Kev, KMS Band, Vibe Band and Kes the Band. The opening night of the Village started and ended with perhaps one theme: resilience.