

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Claude O. Markoe Celebrates 60th Anniversary

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ST. CROIX -- Claude O. Markoe Elementary School (COMS) Principal Wendy Gonzales recently gave a powerful lesson in history to set the stage for what would become a momentous occasion marking the school's "60 years of serving the community with love and high expectations for all", according to a Department of Education release.

The grand affair, marked by unforgettable entertainment by the school's K-6 students, was held in the cafetorium on May 22, the same month and day Claude O. Markoe School was chartered by the V.I. Legislature 60 years ago. "Many great minds have passed through these halls. You are the diamonds of this school. You will go down in history," the principal told students. "May Claude O. Markoe Elementary School remain forever a haven to nurture and protect because you are truly the diamond stars of the

world.”

In a motivational speech to 6th graders, Mistress of Ceremonies Crystal Peter echoed Principal Gonzales’s sentiments and added a twist, “The 60th Anniversary Class of Claude O. Markoe School you will go down in history.”

The students followed their mentors’ instructions, and while their parents and other guests watched from the audience, delved into performances fitting for a Marlin Diamond, unconquerable and enduring. COMS Steel Orchestra renditions of classical tunes, coordinated by Dr. Phyllis Ryan, was heartwarming and inspiring to adults and students who aspire to emulate COMS alumni who have gone on to be great educators, economic leaders, and business executives. The pounding of the pans echoing through the room in harmony achieved the mission of getting the audience ready for a great show at a great institution.

Then, the celebration began. On stage, students performed by class or by groups, such as the school choir. Kindergarten teacher Dian John-Browne’s class compared COMS uniforms from the past to the present.

“The uniform from 1958 to 1969 was a chocolate-brown pleated skirt with white blouse for the girls, and khaki pants with white shirt for the boys,” revealed John-Browne, as students modeled the uniforms.

“Now, the uniform is a baby blue, navy blue, white and blue pleated knee-length jumper with straps or bibs for K to third grade girl students,” John-Browne reminded the audience. “Fourth to 6th grade girls wear knee-length skirts with a white blouse, and boys wear long khaki pants and a white Polo shirt with a collar.” The reflection continued with Dr. Ryan directing the third graders through a happy, nostalgic song, Flip, Flop, Fly.

A group of 6th grade students took the stage in style, as they provided a dramatic look at the common hair styles between 1970 and 1980. First and second graders came together for a flashback of the ’80s, as they belted out the lyrics to Bob Marley’s, Three Little Birds, directed by Dr. Ryan and accompanied on electric guitar by art teacher, June Charles. Competitive games most popular from 1981 to 1990 at school were described and played by second graders. The students hopped, imitating the steps in the hopscotch game, pitched real marbles, threw jacks, and played red light, green light 123, to the audience’s delight.

The “old time” games fueled the multi-level school choir, directed by Lystra James, to chant a round of traditional songs like, Coconut, Banana, Mango and Sly Mongoose, exciting the audience. First graders cooled things down a bit as they offered treats popular from 1991 to 2000, such as the ice pop.

Third grade students slowly brought the gathering back to the present with music and dances spanning the years 1991 to 2018. The Gems of the Virgin Islands presentation by second grade students sealed the link between the now and then. They recited poems on the flags of the Virgin Islands, the sugar mills, the yellow breast bird, and the ginger thomas or yellow cedar flower--all part of the Virgin Islands identity. Fifth grade students followed with a skit titled “Parent Involvement -- Then and Now,” which showed how parents of the past had no distractions, such as smart phones or computers, to keep

them from getting involved in their children's education.

The celebration came to a dramatic, diamond-studded conclusion with musical performances, as 4th graders sang and danced to O La Le, and 6th grade students picking up the pace with the jazzy, Slap That Bass.

Claude O. Markoe Elementary School's week-long 60th Diamond Jubilee Celebration began on Sunday, May 20 with a church service at St. Patrick's Catholic Church followed by a brunch at the school. On Monday, May 21, alumni interacted with students. Along with the school-wide program on Tuesday, May 22, there was a staff appreciation banquet at Government House Ballroom in Christiansted. Wednesday, May 23, was set aside to beautify the school's campus. Thursday, May 24, staff members were adorned in the school's uniform, while students tried to emulate their favorite teacher in dress and manner. Friday, May 25 was dedicated to a staff appreciation and fun day.

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