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Drag Racing Track on St. Croix Aims For December Reopening, Christmas Races

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Drag Racing By. VI CONSORTIUM VIA ALAMY

ST. CROIX — Drag racing on St. Croix is expected to come alive in December, with the Caribbean Drag Racing Association, a St. Croix organization with a facility located near the Airport Road, aiming to host Christmas races.

The plans are ambitious; the track was devastated by Hurricane Maria in 2017. But with \$500,000 being provided by the government — monies approved by Governor Albert Bryan through legislation sponsored by Senator Novelle Francis and Javan James — and with the support of private donors such as VIGL, Home Depot, and St. Croix Renaissance Park, the association's plans are not unachievable.

There's also support from the Dept. of Sports, Parks and Recreation, whose commissioner, Calvert White, has been fervently providing assistance on a number of fronts.

The facility needs additional funding to make other repairs: from the bleachers (\$39,000), to the restrooms, the main building and even the ceiling. Mr. White said the cost for such repairs will be between \$200,000 to \$250,000. That's not included in the \$500,000 being provided by the government, which will be used to pave the track with asphalt. V.I. Paving is expected to start work in earnest this week.



Hurricane-damaged drag racing bleachers and building on St. Croix. (Ernice Gilbert/VI Consortium)

Arthur Hector, Sr., president of the Caribbean Drag Racing Association, said the association had been working to secure funding from public and private sources ever since he took over as president in January 2018. He said association members met with Senators Francis and James, which was followed by a meeting with Mr. Bryan that was facilitated by St. Croix Administrator Sammuel Sanes. Mr. Hector said he made a presentation to the governor, who in turn promised to

support the effort.

"Anything around recreation and getting young people involved, widening the scope of our tourism product from a sports perspective or just from an entertainment perspective, we support," the governor said during an interview last Monday at the track. "And this is one where you had a coalition of private sector that's directly involved like V.I. Paving, and those not directly involved like VIGL, who did some of the work here as well too. We couldn't do nothing else but support." Mr. Bryan said the administration would provide additional funding for the turn-around road, and he spoke of hosting a formal dedication ceremony for the facility once work is completed.

"It's not a lot of money and the impact on the community is multiplied a hundred times," Mr. Bryan said. The \$500,000 in funding is being provided through the Internal Revenue Matching Fund, according to Mr. Francis.

Private sector support has been strong. VIGL provided \$100,000 to the association which was used to pave with concrete the track's launch pad. The remaining stretch for the races will be paved with asphalt. The total length of the stretch is half a mile. The width of the track is 47 feet.

Home Depot provided \$12,000 worth of material to repair the roof.

And the St. Croix Renaissance Park has provided additional land that will serve as a turn-around lane for competing vehicles.

The association said it will take roughly two months for V.I. Paving to complete work on the track.

Mr. White, the Sports, Parks and Recreation commissioner, is said to be one of the main forces in moving the project forward. When he was approached initially about helping to repair the facility, the project was stalled.

"I started making phone calls to see how we could get it back on track using government and private resources," Mr. White said during an interview last Monday. He spoke with Public Works Asst. Commissioner Dennis Brow, who in turn had a crew out at the track working to clear the grounds the next day.



V.I. Paving is scheduled to start work in earnest on the track today. The government approved \$500,000 for the paving of the track with funds secured through the Internal Revenue Matching Fund, according to Senator Novelle Francis. (Ernice Gilbert/VI Consortium)

"There was a lot of overgrown bushes and what not; a lot of debris, and the very next day Asst. Commissioner Brow had a crew out here assisting," Mr. White said. However, after realizing that the job was greater than originally estimated, the Dept. of Sports, Parks and Recreation hired a company called Higher Heights to assist with cleaning and debris removal.

Mr. White said the association has a junior drag racing program that Sports, Parks and Recreation is interested in. "We're going to continue to assist them with the resources we have," he said.

Sen. Francis spoke of attending races during his years as a youth, which helped in shaping his decision to support the funding. "I've even worked with the guys to get them private sponsorship for some of the races from before. I remember coming here from my teenage years, so I'm hoping to see it get to that level where we will start to see some work," he said last Monday.

Mr. Francis added, "But even more important for me, it's a safety issue having individuals not having a facility and racing on the roads."

The property on which the facility is located is owned by the V.I. Port Authority, said Mr. White. He said a memorandum of understanding between V.I.P.A. and the association has been in place.