

The Virgin Islands Consortium

First Mango Melee After 2017 Storms Is Grander Than Ever

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ST. CROIX -- Hurricanes Irma and Maria left the Botanical Garden in St. George ravaged in September 2017. Trees were toppled, roads impassable, damage to facilities vivid. In that moment, it seemed like it would take years to get the beloved garden going again.

But never underestimate the human determination. Led by Amy Parker DeSorbo, director of administration and development for about a year and a half at the Botanical Garden, Ms. DeSorbo quickly gathered a team and started feverishly working to reopen. In fact, a Christmas event was held at the garden in December -- three months following the devastating 2017 storms.

"I'm ecstatic," Ms. DeSorbo said about this year's Mango Melee being hosted after facing fierce adversity, which not only included the damage left by Hurricane Maria, but also a tropical storm named Beryl that threatened the USVI and Puerto Rico over the weekend.

"The St. Croix island family came together and celebrate, not live in fear of the storm that's eluding us, but to come out and celebrate; this is healing so I'm very excited," she said.

Not only did this year's event take place, it saw a variety of new offerings that added even more value to an already well established celebration of culture. Take the Miss Mango showcase, for example, which saw children and adults strutting down a runway in cultural wear.

Other new additions included a V.I.P. tent complete with catering, a Mango Mermaid affair, a grander opening ceremony that included the We Deh Yah Cultural Dancers, Children's Museum activities and more.

A community outreach component was also added, Ms. DeSorbo made known, including signup areas for Meals on Wheels, Senior Volunteer Program and Island Therapy Solutions.

This year's turnout was surprisingly strong, as there was a belief that potential attendees would be deterred by Beryl. But as with past years, the road leading to and way past the garden was lined with vehicles, a sign that the turnout was good. Upon entering, that suspicion was immediately confirmed, with hundreds traversing the grounds, patronizing vendors, mingling, enjoying the entertainment and overall appreciating what has become a mainstay in terms of cultural events on St. Croix.

This year's Mango Melee was the 22nd annual, according to organizers.

The biggest event at the Mango Melee is the Mango Eating Competition, as it's called. There are two categories in this event: Children and Adults. The organizers said the competition almost did not occur because Hurricane Maria had destroyed or damaged so many mango trees on St. Croix, but with the help of Plaza Extra East, it was made possible.

This year's adults' winner was Erik Doane, with Peyton Schindler, 9, seen second from left in the feature image, taking the win in the children's competition.

Image Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC