

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Plans For St. Croix Festival Under Tourism In Motion; Department Plans Advance Promotions, Packages To Woo Vacation Travelers

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ST. CROIX -- The passage and subsequent [signing into law](#) of a bill that places the execution of the territory's festivals and carnival under the Department of Tourism, is to take effect with the 2019-2020 Crucian Christmas Festival, and D.O.T. has already been working to get the ball rolling, including the process of hiring a director and creating promotions aimed at USVI diaspora and Eastern Caribbean vacation hunters.

Rumors have abounded that the old order, which ends with the St. John Festival this year, would remain, so The Consortium reached out to D.O.T. Commissioner Designee Joseph

Boschulte and Senator Janelle Sarauw, a sponsor of the bill along with Senator Myron Jackson, for clarity.

Turns out, according to both Mr. Boschulte and Ms. Sarauw, plans are well underway for the upcoming St. Croix Festival. Ms. Sarauw said the current St. Croix Festival Committee will not see the \$500,000 allocated to it annually for the execution of the festival. Instead, the monies will remain with D.O.T., whose role it is now to implement the events.

"I have met with Commissioner Designee Joseph Boschulte about five times in his position and he's pretty excited about the carnival bill. He said he needed an additional \$2.1 million in supplemental appropriation to get it done," Ms. Sarauw said.

Mr. Boschulte told The Consortium that the supplemental budget was submitted to the Office of Management and Budget (O.M.B.), and includes salaries and fringe benefits proposed under the new law. The budget also includes funding to promote the upcoming Crucian Christmas Festival. "We're waiting to hear back. We've had conversations with a few senators and O.M.B. Director Designee [Jenifer] O'Neal because we need to get those funds in place so we could bring the team on," Mr. Boschulte said.



The execution of the territory's festival arts was among Mr. Boschulte's top priorities upon his appointment as D.O.T. commissioner. "When I came into office one of the first things I did was to sit with my team and we did some research on what it would take to properly staff the initiative, which is to have a director of carnival/festival activities, and then three assistant directors, per the law, for each one of the islands' specific events," he said.

D.O.T.'s plans for the festival season on St. Croix under the new law sounds promising. Mr. Boschulte is pushing for O.M.B. to release the funds soon so that promotion and marketing can begin well before the season, giving potential visitors a chance to plan. "We're trying to make sure that we get the message out on time," he said. "We understand that most people work and they need time in advance to plan their trips. That's why we need to market the St. Croix Festival now."

Targeted marketing areas for USVI diaspora on the mainland, Mr. Boschulte said, include New York, New Jersey, Atlanta, Washington DC, South Florida, Orlando and other states. Marketing will also be geared towards Eastern Caribbean islands. "We believe there's a strong linkage with the Eastern Caribbean and the territory," Mr. Boschulte said. He said packages will be created to entice potential visitors. The commissioner designee noted that while the Department of Tourism will be in charge of all three events, each will remain unique to the island it represents, hence creating a diversity and attraction that could drive millions of dollars to the USVI annually via the festival arts.



Jouvert Morning 2019 in St. Thomas

"We want to make sure that once you land on USVI soil, that's when the great experience starts and it doesn't end until you're leaving," Mr. Boschulte said.

Ms. Sarauw had similar sentiments. "CARICOM and a lot of Caribbean journals have indicated that Caribbean heads of state and government have missed the mark on capitalizing on cultural products and carnival, and that carnivals generate money," the senator said. "It's a revenue-generating stream that when done correctly can help an economy. I'm not saying that the carnival bill is the end-all to our economic woes, but we have to diversify the economic portfolio from what it is currently, and we have to stop thinking that the only way to generate revenue is to tax, and tax and tax.

Mr. Boschulte said he and his team have held talks for the vision of carnival under D.O.T., "and to have it be one of the featured products for our overall offering as we go out and continue to come back from the storms. We see this as a nice subset to our overarching strategy to attract and retain vacation and business visitors to the U.S. Virgin Islands."

The search for a director of festivals is underway. "I have been approached by several people who have been involved over the years in the festival promotion and production on St. Croix. It's our hope that as soon as we get the money, the pace of conversations will increase quickly," the commissioner designee said. He said D.O.T. would reach out to O.M.B. today to see if at least a portion of the funds could be released. "Because that gives us the necessary funding to put in place a plan that's effective."

The department is expected to produce reports that could be used to inform future carnival and festival events, to determine growth areas, weak spots, and where changes are needed. The need for transparency was one of the main reasons for the bill, and D.O.T. is expected to be forthcoming with how the funds are utilized. "We are going to have a firm backbone and we're going to be financial transparent," Mr. Boschulte said.

There will also be changes in the way things are done. For example, events are expected to start on time under D.O.T. "Whether its the parades, Jouvert or a night in the Village, time is important," Mr. Boschulte said.

[Watch the original video](#)