

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Randolph Donovan And Kashief Hamilton Are Heroes Of The V.I. Feel-Good Story Of The Summer

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ST. THOMAS -- Tourism, cruise line and government dignitaries took the day Monday to formally and publicly thank two St. Thomian friends for acts of bravery that saved a young girl's life when her wheelchair plunged into the harbor at the West Indian Company dock at Havensight a week ago.

"There is no greater love than laying down one's life for one's friends - in this case, these friends sprung into action, to ensure a life was saved," V.I. Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte said. "We give thanks to them and to God for their selfless act of bravery, which has inspired our community in the U.S. Virgin Islands and the world at large."

He was talking, of course, about Randolph Donovan and Kashief Hamilton, friends who have become the Virgin Islands's feel-good story of the summer, and celebrities of sorts after their heroic rescue of the young tourist was caught on video and viewed around the world.

Mr. Donovan and Mr. Hamilton, in the company of family, friends and a host of well-wishers, were celebrated aboard Carnival Cruise Line's 2,000-passenger Fascination. The Fascination is the same ship at the WICO dock at Havensight Mall when the pair sprung into action last week.

"Two amazing humble gentlemen," is how Anthony Ottley, interim president and CEO of West Indian Company, described Hamilton and Donovan. "One thing I told them is to soak in all that's given them, all the accolades." All of the dignitaries on hand were there "to give you guys the love you rightfully deserve."

Rewind a week. Carnival cruise ship Fascination had just sailed into St. Thomas last Monday when thousands of the ship's passengers headed for excursions around the island.

One passenger, a wheelchair-bound young woman was with her family when her chair accidentally rolled off the dock. Her blessing was that Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Donovan were at the dock.

They are members of the Department of Tourism's Visitor Experience team. Mr. Donovan is usually in his mocko jumbie outfit, entertaining passengers as they left the ship. This was a day off, but he came down to the WICO dock (in plain clothes) to be with rest of the team on a busy cruise day.

Mr. Hamilton - better known locally as DJ Kuntry - was playing spinning records. "We heard some loud screaming, so I stopped the music," he said. "We went to the edge and saw in the water in a wheel chair. Randolph, he just jumped in. I threw down the donut (the round flotation device). ... At the time we didn't know for sure that she was handicapped.

When he couldn't get her out of the wheelchair. He tried to place the donut over her.

"While Randolph was doing that, he was getting fatigued. The look on his face was, like, I can't go no more, 'Chief I can't go no more. When I jumped in, I tied the rope around them and pulled them in."

Mr. Donovan said he could not hesitate. "Really, I couldn't think about it," he said. "I just jumped in."

That simple. Two friends acting bravely to save a strangers life. Don't think. Jump in because another person needed their help.

"They were extremely heroic. To be aware of their surroundings, see a situation and no think, just reaction. That timing and reaction made all the difference in that young lady's life," Mr. Boschulte said.

In recognition of their selfless act, WICO provided Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Donovan with tickets for a cruise of their choice.

Kevin Rodriguez, deputy chief of staff to Gov. Albert Bryan, told the V.I. heroes that Government House was providing two round-trip airline tickets to and from the city where their cruise voyage begins. "We want to recognize these two heroes. A hero is a person that has demonstrated courage. On August 12, these two young men -- two Virgin Islanders -- demonstrated courage that exemplified (the notion) that the person in the water is one of us and we must save her. For that, I want to commend you. And not only you, but your parents to raise two young men who have clearly shown what it is to be family."

The smiles were big and infectious and rarely left Mr. Donovan's or Mr. Hamilton's faces. Except for the brief emotional moment that "DJ Kuntry" gave thanks to all who drew him a little closer to their own hearts over the past week. "It's kind of overwhelming ... yes."

Mr. Donovan's message: "I just want to keep saying thank you again."