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A Taste of What's to Come: St. Croix's Premier Culinary Showcase Goes Virtual With Focus on Restaurants, Destination and Sponsors

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Ridge to Reef Farm presenters during Thursday's scaled back Taste of St. Croix event at the Divi Casino parking lot. By. A TASTE OF ST. CROIX

ST. CROIX — St. Croix's premier culinary event, the famous "Taste of St. Croix", welcomed the media and sponsors to a scaled back food-tasting affair on Thursday evening at the Divi Casino parking lot, and while the well-organized foodie occasion did not disappoint, it only represented a precursor to the main dish which is scheduled for later this year.

The event was also carried live online and was served to many parts of the mainland U.S. and other destinations through a partnership with Anthony Weeks's Kalaloo Network, said Taste of

St. Croix Founder Collin Hodge. Music from a deejay and steelpanist enveloped the atmosphere as a number of restaurants served up their favorite dishes to eager guests. Though opened to only the media and sponsors, the occasion kept the Taste of St. Croix's signature style and vibrancy alive, while adding a twist to the decor: over the years, the Taste of St. Croix allowed guests to sample a restaurant's offerings while immediately moving on to the next. This time, there was seating available — a nice touch for those looking to rest weary limbs during the hourslong good-time.

It was also the first Taste of St. Croix to be held during a pandemic, and it comes following a number of challenging years for the organizers, who had to scramble to change locations following the devastating storms of 2017, which resulted in the move from the event's primary location of Divi Carina Bay Hotel [to downtown Christiansted](#).

"It was one of those things that you wanted to do but at the same time take every precaution during the pandemic," said Mr. Hodge. "I had to reshuffle the deck and the focus to quality, not quantity, not a fundraiser, but more focusing on the restaurants that made the event and showcasing them to the world. This is also a virtual event which means it's live all around the world so the restaurants and the destination became the focus."

He added, "That is to say I don't know if it's exclusive in terms of who is here because who is here are the sponsors and the media, which is who make the event possible. So I'm really trying to showcase and highlight the restaurants because they were the most hard-hit during the pandemic."

Mr. Hodge spoke of his experience as a restaurateur himself, having closed one of his operations, Martinis Lounge and Nightclub, and his other business, Subway, also suffered lost revenue.

"I also have friends that have lost their businesses due to the pandemic. So I understand directly and indirectly how these businesses are suffering and I wanted them to showcase their offerings," he said.

Interestingly, Thursday's Taste of St. Croix wasn't called the 21st annual. "It was a called 'A Taste of St. Croix Virtual Edition' because we are hoping to do the 21st annual when the economy reopens and when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines give us an indication on how many people we can get together in groups," Mr. Hodge said. "So the focus, hopefully in November which is normally the beginning of our peak season, is to do the 21st Annual Taste of St. Croix with whatever guidelines the CDC has in place, which we should be open up by then."

Longtime Taste of St. Croix attendees and best friends, former Sen. Alicia Hansen and ubiquitous St. Croix attorney Lee Rohn, said they could not miss the event and felt good about getting out. "I'm enjoying it just as much because it's so special that we're finally getting out and we're finally getting kinda back to normal — and we get to be with great friends," Ms. Rohn said.

Mrs. Hansen said she felt "awesome" being at the event, adding, "I get an opportunity to dress and to be among people, especially my best friend," she said referring to Ms. Rohn. "Not only that but we've always come to the Taste of St. Croix together for years. Even when I'm not thinking about it, she says, 'Chucky you can't miss it, I have your ticket.'"

"This time was no different," the former senator added, praising the sponsors for supporting the Taste. "Too many of us are stressed out just being at home, so when we go out we really have an opportunity to just laugh and dance."

Below, the winners of this year's scaled back event, which also came with a reduced category set:

Presentation

- First Place: Ridge - Veggie
- Second Place: Blue Water Terrace - Dessert
- TIE Third Place: Sand Castle on The Beach - Appetizer &
- Rita Chiverton Catering – Soup & Stew

People's Choice

- First Place: Blue Water Terrace
- Second Place: Rita Chirverton Catering
- Third Place: The Galleon