

The Virgin Islands Consortium

33 Teams Participate in 20th Anniversary Relay for Life; Well Over \$100,000 Raised as St. Croix Continues to Show Overwhelming Support

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A collage of Relay for Life participants on Saturday, July 10, 2021. By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

ST. CROIX — The 20th Anniversary of the American Cancer Society's (ACS) Relay for Life is currently being observed between Saturday at 4pm to Sunday at noon at the St. Croix Educational Complex School's track on St. Croix. This years theme is "Conquering Cancer One Color at a Time".

Due to the the Covid-19 pandemic, the annual community awareness fundraiser was not publicly observed last year. A motorcade served as the annual observance in its place. This year, the walk for a cause continues with a goal of raising \$150,000, upwards of \$50,000 since previous years, as shared by the committee. Donations are accepted [here](#). Organizers told the Consortium that \$120,000 had been raised even before the official kickoff Saturday, suggesting a successful event as the Virgin Islands community — heavily impacted by cancer — continues to show strong support.

Funds raised remain in the U.S. Virgin Islands and help in a number of areas, including free mammograms and off-island travel for care.

Thirty-three teams registered for the event this year, and many more showed up Saturday afternoon as individual supporters.

For the past 20 years faithfully, Viya— the territory's major communications network— sponsored and supported Relay for Life on all three islands. Viya has a booth at this year's St. Croix event, provided gifts and prizes for the survivors, and they encouraged their employees to donate and participate in the event to support fellow employees who are fighting cancer. Additionally, the communications company had a team of 15 people.

“Usually when we sponsor, it's not just writing a check. We really get engaged and involved,” shared Viya's VP of public relations and governmental affairs Jennifer Matarangas-King.

“I don't think there's anyone in the territory—as small as we are—[who] can say that they don't have a friend, a relative, or someone who has passed from cancer. I think that it's very important that all of us take part to raise as much funds as we can to do the research,” said St. Croix Senator Franklin Johnson on opening day.

Richard Motta, the director of communications for Government House, shared that taking part in Relay for Life raises awareness, provides attendees an outlet to remember the victims while honoring their legacy, and “pays homage to the many people in the community who have been impacted by this disease.”

Speaking from experience as his eldest daughter and father are cancer survivors, Senator Kurt Violet shared the importance of financially supporting the ACS. “They provide relief for those individuals who don't have sufficient monies to go away,” he said.

Two years ago, the Legislature passed a Violet-sponsored measure to annually appropriate \$50,000 toward the local ACS chapter — funds that must be spent to assist Virgin Islanders. Those funds do not go to the national headquarters.

Each year, according to Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory, the Legislature annually contributes over \$2,000 towards the event. She came to the big island to walk with the Legislature's team with her colleagues and fellow legislature staff.

The V.I. Dept. of Labor participated for the first time this year, according to Cindy Richardson and Nesha Christian-Hendrickson, assistant Dept. of Labor commissioners for St. Thomas-St. John and St. Croix respectively. The assist. commissioners spoke to the importance of the event, and said participation this year was paramount to honor an employee, Shauna Bass, who recently died from cancer.

Senator Kenneth Gittens said, "This event is about more than just raising funds, rather it's about continuing to raise awareness of early detection and how it saves lives. I encourage everyone to make a conscious effort and a commitment to living a healthy lifestyle and getting themselves checked regularly."

Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett's team was also on site, with the congresswoman stating Relay for Life is an event she will always support because of how it continues to impact the USVI community.

"When I think of all of the strong, resilient individuals and families that have had their lives forever changed by this disease, it pierces my heart," she said. "That's why it will always be my team's and my honor to participate in our Relay for Life, especially this year, in the 20th Anniversary of this great effort."

She thanked the organizers for planning and executing the annual affair, along with her team and all other groups that make Relay for Life not only possible, but successful. "And finally, to the survivors, the families who have lost someone to cancer and to those still in the fight, thank you so much for your courage. I pray continued strength and grace over each of you," Ms. Plaskett concluded.

Residents of St. Croix still have until noon Sunday to take part in the walk and donate to the American Cancer Society. Keep in mind that the following stipulations by the Department of Health are being enforced in order to enter: Wear a mask, provide proof of a negative Covid antigen test taken no earlier than Thursday, July 8 or provide proof of being fully vaccinated. A picture ID must be presented as well.