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Governor Bryan Commits \$1 Million to Support 175th Emancipation Celebration; 175 People to be Honored

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A statue of General Buddhoe at Emancipation Park in Frederiksted. By. EVERETT A. RYAN FOR D.E.A.R. PRODUCTIONS

Governor Albert Bryan has committed to budgeting \$1 million to go toward activities that will mark the 175th celebration of Emancipation in the territory next year.

He made the announcement at a special press briefing on Friday, where he also signed an executive order for a nine-member commemoration committee to manage the historic event. Committee members include Teri Helenese, Maureen Burke-Ventura, Khnuma Simmonds, Akeem McIntosh, Senator Carla Joseph, former Senator Myron Jackson, Jamila Russell and Jelani Ritter.

The milestone anniversary will posthumously honor 175 people, in keeping with the 175th celebration.

“We are going to honor 175 Keepers of the Flame. People who have come before us that have not only laid a path of prosperity for the Virgin Islands and a place where people of color could feel like they can express themselves; lead and be led and be able to participate in commerce and in civic, government activities. A fantastic gift that has been given to us in the most beautiful place in the world, here in the Virgin Islands,” Governor Bryan explained.

The governor said he was inspired by his visit to the African-American Museum of History in 2019.

“Nobody didn’t free us,” he remarked confidently, telling the audience of a story between himself and his nephew following that trip.

“We free ourselves here in the Virgin Islands. And, it’s that same fire burning and spirit that is in us now,” the governor voiced, suggesting that it is “mental slavery” that has trapped Virgin Islanders in what he described as “a region of lack of self-care and self-knowledge and self-acknowledgement.”

He is hoping that next year’s celebration will help to change the perspective of the youth who will see themselves represented in local leaders, saying, “We’re going to [erect] bust in parks to honor local heroes. To know that they have come from something that is beautiful and that they too can be anything they want to be.

“So that our children could remember that there are those who came before them. That their only look is not only to Martin Luther King but also to Queen Mathilda and to a Ruby Rouss.”

Additionally, as part of Virgin Island Freedom Week, Former USVI Senator Carol Burke said a portion of Frederiksted roadway will officially be named Emancipation Drive.

“We’re going to erect two columns that is fittingly designated to commemorate, to revere all the slaves and all who traversed that area,” she stated.

Brass plaques will also be erected on roads that were named after cultural bearers and the bust of local hero Buddhoe will replace the copper sculpture of King Richard in the Emancipation Garden in St. Thomas.