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New Exhibit at the Virgin Islands Museum Exploring History and Culture of Indigenous People in Territory

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A new exhibit at the Virgin Islands Children's Museum is exploring the history and culture of Indigenous people in the territory, the museum has made known in a release. The exhibit was developed in partnership with the Guainía Taíno Tribe of the Virgin Islands in what is slated to be the first of a multiphase endeavor to celebrate and educate visitors about Pre-Columbian Virgin Islanders: Taino, Kalinago (Karib), and Igeri (Arawak).

According to the release, the VI Guainía Taíno Tribal kasike (chieftain) Maekiaphan Phillips and other members of the tribe have erected a replica of a Taíno bohío inside the Virgin Islands Children's Museum to bolster cultural survival and educate visitors about ancestral Taíno life. A bohío (boh-ee-oh) is a house built of woven palm leaves and wood from the royal palm tree. The thatched roofed hut has been filled with household objects needed for the maintenance of an

ancestral Taíno family; a pretend play fire pit, agricultural products such as corn, toy fish, baskets and Taíno history and story books have been added to make it fun and easy for kids and their caregivers to learn about Taíno culture together. The bohío exhibit incorporates multiple avenues for learning through imaginative play, sensory exploration, and storytelling.

“The stories passed down through oral history of our ancestry and ancestral way of life are being lost. I believe all types of museums can help to preserve and transmit traditional ancestral knowledge by teaching our children the culture, traditions, and history of their past,” said kasike Phillips.

Humans first arrived in the Virgin Islands about 2,500 to 3,000 years ago from South America and around 500 to 1,000 years ago Taíno culture was established in the territory, according to the museum. Although Elements of Taíno culture remain strong in parts of the Caribbean, it has only been a little over one year since Governor Albert Bryan Jr. signed a proclamation recognizing the Guainía Taíno Tribe of the Virgin Islands; The Taíno bohío exhibit has been established in time to celebrate that one year anniversary and to observe the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples on August 9th. The goals of the Taíno bohío exhibit at the Virgin Islands Children’s Museum are to correct misinformation, to build awareness of the vitality and diversity of contemporary Taíno in the territory, and to inspire appreciation and the desire to learn more about native traditions among native and non-native visitors.

"We hope the Taíno bohío exhibit will spark conversations between caregivers and their children about traditional ways of life in the Virgin Islands and increase the visibility of Indigenous Peoples from throughout the Caribbean region,” said Amber McCammon, VICM Curator. The U.S. Virgin Islands are the homelands of Taíno people who have ongoing cultural and spiritual connections to this area. The Virgin Islands Children’s Museum is committed to acknowledging and honoring the human history tied to this land.

Guainía Taíno Tribe of the Virgin Islands is seeking donations to sponsor their tribal leader to attend a gathering of Taíno peoples in Cuba later this year.

“To be invited to the gathering is an honor and any financial support that would allow me to represent our ever growing tribe would be wholeheartedly appreciated,” said kasike Phillips.

Donors can support the Guainía tribe Opi’a Taíno 501(c) Non-Profit organization and kasike Phillips’ participation in the Taíno summit by clicking on the donate now button on their website <https://opiataino.com/>

Explore how ancestral Taíno lived by visiting the Virgin Islands Children’s Museum located in Buccaneer Mall, Havensight, on St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. The museum is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday, and from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday. It is closed Mondays.