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Lechon Festival Returns Like it Never Left After Yearslong Hiatus

Culture / **Published On December 05, 2022 05:14 AM /**

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A man is seen slicing roast pork at the 2022 Lechon Festival on St. Croix (12.4.22). By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

Like many other cultural events, the Lechon Festival, held annually on St. Croix, was placed on pause since 2019 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. But the event — which celebrates Hispanic heritage and influence on the island — came roaring back on Sunday with a strong turnout, good food and lively music as if it never left.

This year it was held at the Asado Crucian-Latin Grill, a restaurant on Hess Road in Castle Coakley, and as with past years, familiar and new faces were present.

Music permeated the small area as an atmosphere of joy filled the festival. Among dignitaries present was First Lady Yolanda Bryan, who was seen dancing and having a good time.

The Lechon Festival celebrates the Hispanic culture on St. Croix and serves as a gathering where the entire island, not just Hispanics, can enjoy and have a fun, safe time, according to organizers. A domino tournament and a 50/50 raffle were highlights of the event.

Lechon Festival President Jose Nieves expressed elation that the festival could continue from where it left off following the Covid-19 pandemic.

"I know a lot of people had concerns about the new location, saying that it is too small. However, we have been doing this for six years, so when a space is available, we make the best out of it," he said. Mr. Nieves's reference to six years referred to his tenure as the Lechon Festival president, not its existence. This year is the festival's 14th annual function, with the 13th event [being held in 2019](#).

"My goal is that my vendors are happy and that whatever they produce that the customers will love," he added.

Mr. Nieves said the organizing committee chose Cinthia Sanes as this year's honoree because of her dedication in serving the community. "She has been working with the Dolphins Swim Team for years. These are people in the community where others do not see their work because they are always in the background, so I thought it was special to do that," he said.

Mrs. Sanes stated, "I would never have imagined that they would select me. I am grateful that we are bringing awareness to learning to swim. We live on an island and there are many cases of people drowning."

The event has been a favorite for many in the community over the years. "I have been to quite a few lechon festivals in my life," said an attendee who identified herself as Marisol. "This is a really good one right after Covid. We are ready to be outside. This year I was looking forward to seeing people; I missed seeing everyone. After Covid started, we stopped seeing each other in person and I really missed that."

Jean Riviere, owner of Sweet Delights participated this year for the first time. "This is my first year and so far it is a good experience," she said. "I sell cotton candy, popcorn, candy apples and fruit juices. Next year I will be back."

Entertainment was provided by Unlimited Sounds from St. Croix and Untouchables from Vieques.

The proceeds of the 50/50 raffle will go to the St. Croix's Swimming Association (St. Croix Dolphins Swim Team). The committee sought to raise \$2,000 and at about 2:30 p.m. Sunday had raised roughly \$900.

The domino tournament's grand prize was \$2,000 and was split between the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners.