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St. Croix Christmas Boat Parade Returns in All its Glory; Founder Calls For Younger Generation to Take Over as He Prepares to Retire

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A picture collage of the 2022 Christmas Boat Parade on St. Croix. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

The annual Christmas Boat Parade and Fireworks event returned to St. Croix Saturday in all its glory, and Virgin Islanders along with visitors flocked to the Christiansted Boardwalk to partake in one of the island's favorite holiday gatherings.

The crowds were so large that finding parking in town was an impossible task. Another large group of people gathered at the Christiansted Bypass lookout, which overlooks the Christiansted town seafront and makes for a perfect location to enjoy the boat parade and accompanying fireworks.

Willard John, co-chair of St. Croix Christmas Boat Parade, spoke with excitement about the event. "This boat parade is so exciting, we've already done seven out of twenty boats," he told the Consortium. "They're highly decorated, they're beautiful colors, and everybody is so excited about this parade because it's been three years since we've had one and now we're doing it. Look at all the people on the boardwalk! When this is done we will be talking about fireworks. And the unique thing about the firework is it will be synchronized with our local music, Quelbe."

Vendors lined the stretch of road alongside the Caravelle Hotel; moko jumbies paraded back and forth entertaining eventogers; businesses in town remained open late into the night to provide entertainment and other services — all of which made the town more alive than its been in years.

Sal Sanpere, founder of the event which is celebrating its 22nd year, gave insight into its early days. "We didn't have no boat parade at one point. It started off very small with few boats and it was decided that there will be no more," he told the Consortium. "I couldn't let that happen. I said no. I spoke with the boaters and they agreed that they would continue to work with me.

"At times you will be tested but I know what it takes. I was able to get 30 boats my first year. The next year I attended an event with fireworks. A guy from Hess was operating it at the time. I spoke to him and he said yes he would do it for me.

"From then I decided to incorporate that with the boat parade. Now the fireworks are triple the size from what it used to be. I am very proud to give the people of St. Croix an event like this to enjoy. I am hoping that the younger blood will take over."

Mr. Sanpere also revealed that he would soon retire, and he called on the younger generation to take the reins. "I am 84 and it's time to retire," he said. "Hopefully it will still continue way after I am gone. The fireworks this year will be coordinated with sound. That's a first."