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St. Croix Undergoing 'Steady Tourism Development' as Airport Project Opens Up 'Opportunity Galore'

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Governor Albert Bryan Jr. addressed an audience of over 60 professionals including airport operators, terminal developers, contractors, architects and investment bankers at the Standard Aviation facility in St. Thomas on Feb. 1, 2023. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

While the public-private partnership sought to develop the two major airports in the USVI are expected to spur economic development across the territory, from officials' remarks during Wednesday's industry forum it was obvious that much excitement and anticipation surrounded the prospects for development on St. Croix

Willard John, Chair of the Virgin Islands Port Authority, said it plainly during his remarks at the forum - “St. Croix is the future of development in the USVI”. Governor Albert Bryan Jr. agreed. “St. Croix airport has the most potential,” he said.

Local officials see St. Croix as a key factor in the wider territorial development strategy due to the large potential for growth that exists. Not only is the Henry Rohlsen airport approximately twice as large as Central Park in New York City, according to Larry Belinsky, Managing Director of Frasca LLC, but the 400 acres across the road from the airport was “opportunity galore”, as described by VIPA Executive Director Carlton Dowe. Potential existed there, Dowe mused, for hotel and other tourism-related business as well as for cargo and other commercial operations.

During the press briefing that followed, Governor Bryan responded to a question from Consortium publisher Ernice Gilbert regarding the capacity of the big island to accommodate the larger numbers of visitors the revamped airport is expected to be able to process through the facility.

The governor acknowledged that the administration’s efforts to attract new hotel construction to St. Croix have thus far not borne much fruit. “We’ve kissed many frogs that haven’t turned into princes in terms of hotel development,” Mr. Bryan said. However, he was undaunted. “What we’re focusing [on] now is bringing back our properties that we already have that are underperforming or have not come up to [par] yet.”

He listed a number of expansion and redevelopment projects already in train or recently completed — the sale and integration of King’s Alley Hotel and King Christian, the recently opened rebranded Divi Carina Bay Beach Resort and Casino included — and spoke about other projects being worked on by the administration, Mahogany Run and Carambola Golf Course among them. “In St. Croix, what you’re seeing is steady, steady tourism development.”

The governor expressed his satisfaction with the pace of progress on St. Croix, saying that it gives the local industry time to adjust to increasing demand and offer additional or enhanced services accordingly. “Slow development of our tourism product on St. Croix is good,” Mr. Bryan argued.