

The Virgin Islands Consortium

'Commemorate, Educate, Celebrate!': Theme for 175th Emancipation Anniversary Celebrations Unveiled

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

'Commemorate, Educate, Celebrate!' That's the theme for this year's 175th Anniversary Celebrations of the Emancipation of slavery in the United States Virgin Islands, revealed by the nine-member committee appointed to manage the historic event.

Committee chair Carol M. Burke said the members have come up with a framework which will serve as a guide to organize events and enhance historic landmarks in commemoration of the emancipation anniversary.

Ms. Burke outlined some of the plans which include school activities, storytelling, art competitions and exhibits, listening sessions and public displays.

A new emancipation-themed license plate was also commissioned as part of the observance of this milestone anniversary. Director of the VI Bureau of Motor Vehicles, Barbara Jackson McIntosh said that the design and production of the commemorative plate was funded by the VI Historical Commemorative Fund.

“As such, the Bureau of Motor Vehicles in conjunction with the Commemorative committee has designed a beautiful license plate,” she said. “We believe that this license plate captures the essence of our history and the vibrance of the islands. Effective March 1st, 2023 we will be issuing the license plates to anyone who has a temporary plate.”

To facilitate the anticipated surge of vehicle owners wanting to obtain the new, permanent plates, the BMV’s St. Croix and St. Thomas offices will be open from 8 am to 2 pm every Saturday in March, only for people wishing to exchange temporary plates. Vehicle owners with permanent plates whose registrations fall after March can have their license plates switched to the new commemorative plates during their regular registration period. The Emancipation Fund also provided for people age 65 and over to get their plates for free.

Ms. Burke also announced the launch of the Committee’s website - vi175.com - this week.

Features of the site will include a calendar of events to be held in commemoration of the 175th anniversary, historical information dating back to 1848, a “shareable news engine” to keep islanders in the loop of the Emancipation Committee’s activities, and a mechanism to receive donations.

Secretary and Chair of Corporate Sponsorship Teri Helenese implored corporate sponsors to support the Committee’s vision. “We believe that by highlighting the progress, struggles, sacrifices and collected stories from our rich past we can forge a path forward that will be a blueprint for future generations to come,” she said, describing the goal of what she hoped would be a genuine public-private partnership.

Ms. Helenese also underscored the Committee’s commitment to honoring 175 Virgin Islanders who have played integral roles in the territory’s history. She said the committee will “honor the keepers of the flame, those leaders who are resting in power and whose contributions demand our praise and recognition” as well as living Virgin islanders whose contributions deserve the same.

Placing these nation-builders at the center of commemorative events this year, Ms. Helenese says, will pay due respect to the ancestors and “educate, engage and empower” all Virgin Islanders. The names of the 175 to be honored by the Committee and Governor Albert Bryan will be added to the website when it is launched this week.

To observe the collective history of Ghana and the Virgin Islands, Ms. Helenese announced with pride, invitations were sent to the Ambassador of Ghana and other dignitaries to attend the 175th Commemoration of Emancipation celebrations.

Last year Governor Bryan committed to budgeting \$1 million to go toward this year’s Emancipation activities.

