

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. John Celebration Village, or 'Drinker's Paradise', Opens; Rehugh Hendricks and Raymond Athenase Honored

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Ribbon-cutting ceremony on Thursday, June 29, 2023 in St. John for the opening of the Festival Village. By. USVI DIVISION OF FESTIVALS

In a six-hour extravaganza, the St. John Celebration Village was officially declared open in a ceremony on Thursday night, and named “Drinker’s Paradise” in honor of Raymond Athenase and Rehugh Hendricks, the latter recognized posthumously.

For the opening ceremony, traditionally invited guests including Governor Albert Bryan Jr., Senate President Novelle Francis, and Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, who

joined other government officials, pageant royalty, Mr. Athenase and the family of Mr. Hendricks on the stage platform. Multitudes flowed steadily into the village grounds, eager to witness the spectacle of music, food and entertainment with a St. Johnian flavor.

At the beginning of the event, after receiving his award, Mr. Athenase, a fixture on the St. John Carnival scene, recounted how he, Mr. Hendricks, and about a score of their friends were “just looking to party.” Over two decades ago when the idea of operating the Drinker’s Paradise booth was born, Mr. Athenase said none of them had the slightest idea that they would “still be here twenty something years later, doing it.” Accepting the honor on behalf of his deceased friend as well as himself, Mr. Athenase was briefly overwhelmed at the magnitude of the honor. “This is a lot,” he remarked.

Commissioner of Tourism Joseph Boschulte, along with kind words for the family of Mr. Hendricks, personally thanked Raymond for his contributions to the tourism industry particularly on St. John, calling him “one of our frontline people in the tourism business.”

Governor Bryan praised this year’s honorees for taking the initiative to provide what they thought was lacking in their community. “They didn’t call the radio, they didn’t call Government House, they didn’t harass Novelle Francis,” the governor joked. “They just filled the need.” Mr. Bryan extrapolated that independent spirit to the entire population of the island. “St. John gets it done. Every time,” he declared. “That’s what I love about St. John,” the governor said, thanking in particular the people who coordinate carnival festivities each year.

Following the short award ceremony and official ribbon-cutting, patrons who had been circulating among the 18 booths at the village flocked to the front of the stage to enjoy energetic performances from St. Johnian bands Climax and RVP, Adam O from St. Croix, and Trinidadian Soca act Kes the Band. The show ended around 1:30 am with a sizeable audience pleading for just a little more music as the musicians and tech crew packed up the stage.

However, with acts like Wire to Wire, John Yardie, Spectrum Band, and Voice announced for Friday night in “Drinker’s Paradise”, feters on St. John no longer have to worry about finding somewhere to party during the Carnival season.