

The Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports, and Parks

The Honorable Angel Bolques, Jr.,
Chairman

35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
Friday, April 21, 2023



Calvert A. White
Commissioner
The Department of
Sports, Parks, and Recreation

Good day, Honorable Chairman Angel Bolques, Jr., Chairman of the Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports, and Parks of the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands of the United States (USVI), Honorable Senators, Central Staff, and the listening and viewing audience. I am Calvert White, the Commissioner of the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation (DSPR); here to provide testimony on overview and updates of the Department, our progress, and challenges concerning projects, and our ability to provide high-quality, accessible programs, services, and facilities that enhance the quality of life for all ages, cultures, and abilities, as well as an update on the Department's role during the cultural celebration of the 2023 St. Thomas Carnival.

Allow me to introduce members of my Leadership Team joining us via Teams: Ms. Renee Hansen, Assistant Commissioner – St. Croix, Mr. Vincent Roberts, Assistant Commissioner – St. Thomas/St. John, Ms. Carol Peters, Director of Business and Financial Management, Ms. Rellina Pelle, Human Resources Manager, Ms. Jamilah Henry, District Administrator of Sports and Recreation – St. Croix, Mr. Kirk Thomas, District Administrator of Sports and Recreation – St. Thomas/St. John and Mr. Elroy Hill, Deputy Director – St. John. Also joining me is Mr. Arol Abel, the Department's Disaster Recovery Specialist.

Recovery & Capital Projects

We are grateful that our Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) projects are steadily progressing to restore our storm-damaged facilities. The Department has received just over \$30 million in FEMA grant funding for our hurricane recovery projects. The Recovery Team at DSPR has always continued working to bring each of our projects closer to completion. Recently, we have seen repairs begin at our more frequently used facilities.

On St. Thomas, the Emile Griffith Ballpark has a contractor on site, and is estimated to be completed in September 2023. Improvements to the Emile Griffith Ballpark will include renovations to the restroom, including new ADA stalls, new bleachers, new fencing on the left field and right field lines, and batting cage, a new press box, scoreboard, LED lighting system, revamped storage area, and a new office for the staff and afterschool area. Construction at the Joseph Aubain ballfield is almost complete. This facility will see new fencing, a new batting cage with a pitching machine, renovations on the press box, a new scoreboard, and a new LED lighting system. The estimated completion date for this facility is September 2023. The Kirwin Terrace ballpark also has a contractor on site and is slated to

receive new fencing, a new scoreboard, and a new LED lighting system. The Doris Hodge Tennis Courts contractor is making repairs to the concrete bleachers, roofing, restrooms, new fencing, umpire chairs, and light poles. With the assistance of the Department of Property and Procurement (DPP), the invitation for bid (IFB) for the Alvin McBean Recreation Complex closed just yesterday, April 20th. Contractors bid on extensive repairs to the main building and concession, press box, new scoreboard, new fencing, and bleachers at the Alvin McBean facility.

Projects like the Isaac Boyne's ballfield, the Emile Henderson basketball, and Rudy Krigger Sports Complex have been completed on St. Croix. Cramer's Park has already seen construction on most of the pavilions completed. To ensure the historical importance of the original Cramer's Park Concession building was maintained, FEMA determined that no repairs to the exterior nor upgrades to the interior of the building should be made and instructed DSPR to build a new concession at a different location at the site. With guidance from the VI State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), we have agreed and will use the \$1.6 million obligated to rebuild a new concession. We have identified the new location, and plans for that project's architectural and engineering (A&E) are underway. The contractor of Phase One of the Marley Beachfront project has restored the concrete pillars on the promenade and is working to restore the concrete tables, benches, sidewalks, and handrails and install new light poles.

The selected contractor of the Frederiksted Waterfront Lighting project will restore missing coral stone, the pillars and chains on the waterfront and Vern Richards Park, and new LED inground fixtures. We are in the final stages of the contracting phase of the Reinholdt Jackson project. This project will include fencing, a new scoreboard, an LED lighting system, and repairs to the bleachers, press box, dugouts, batting cage, and playground equipment. DC Canegata Recreational Complex, consisting of the baseball field, softball field, basketball and tennis courts, and recreation center, was split into three separate projects. Both fields will see new fence work, a new scoreboard on the big field, roof work on the seating area, and LED lighting systems. The recreation center will see hazard mitigation wind retrofit to strengthen the building and will include a permanent 60W generator.

DSPR has three FEMA projects in St. John. The Winston Wells ballfield is currently occupied by VI Department of Education (VIDE) modular classrooms however, when the facility is returned to the Department, we will move forward with our hurricane-related repairs. The A&E of the St. John Recreational Center in Cruz Bay is approximately 90% completed, with a cost estimate of \$10 million. The renovated facility will be utilized as a community safe room, specifically designed and constructed to resist wind pressures and wind-borne debris impacts for the purpose of providing life-safety protection. Just yesterday, the contract for the hurricane-related repairs at the Cruz Bay Tennis Courts and the Orville Brown Basketball Courts was signed by the selected contractor and me. We hope to see a Notice to Proceed within the upcoming weeks.

While I only mentioned a few of the 51 DSPR FEMA projects, I assure this body and the viewing and listening public that *all* our projects are equally important. We will continue working on completing all of them so that our community can enjoy our repaired and renovated facilities. I would like to publicly thank the agencies who have been the catalysts to ensure DSPR remains focused and steadfast in our projects' progression. There are two key projects that these agencies are instrumental in advancing. First, we continue to see headway in the Paul E. Joseph Stadium construction. The Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Office of Disaster Recovery (ODR) has been influential in ensuring the contractor produces the negotiated deliverables. The contractor of the project, GEC, has erected the roofs for the left and right field entryway stair towers and has completed the pours for the in-field perimeter walls for the ground floor, the beams to support the upper concourse, and the walls for the ground floor of the elevator shaft for Paul E. Joseph Stadium. Work is in progress to install the steel reinforcement and forms for the upper concourse floor slab. Construction progress meetings are conducted on a routine basis. Additionally, utility coordination and scope review meetings with key stakeholders are conducted as required. The immediate next steps will be the pour of the floor slab for the upper concourse level of the stadium, followed by the steel reinforcement and forms for the bleacher's stairs and risers.

It is no secret that the community eagerly awaits the completion of the Paul E. Joseph Stadium. After completing the project, the Department will hire about seven new employees and purchase equipment to manage and maintain the new facility. Once the

stadium is returned to the Department's inventory, DSPR intends to rejuvenate interisland play and our relationships with our surrounding Caribbean counterparts to host sporting events. A new and improved Paul E. Joseph Stadium will add significant value to the territory's sports tourism product.

The second project both DPW and ODR continue to assist DSPR with is the Vincent Mason Pool project. After demolishing the existing pool, the contractor found that the pool sat on piles, and the design of the foundation needed to be revisited. Adding new piles to the foundation to support the pool design has increased the project cost from \$2.5 million to \$5 million. DSPR, DPW, and ODR diligently work with the contractor and FEMA to ensure this project remains active. It is important to note that this project cannot move forward until FEMA approves the new scope and cost. To Commissioner Derek Gabriel and his team at DPW and Director Adrienne Williams and her team at ODR, WE THANK YOU for your assistance.

We continue resurfacing and restriping our tennis, basketball, and paddle ball courts across the territory. Today, six St. Croix courts are completed, including Emile "Gravy" Henderson Sports Courts, Isaac Boynes Ball Park, Renholdt Jackson Recreation Complex, Princess, and La Valle Recreation Parks. We have also agreed to include the courts at the Youth Rehabilitation Center in Estate Anna's Hope, the Caribbean Centers for Boys and Girls in Estate Two Brothers, and the Police Athletic League in Estate Whim. On St. Thomas, the Milton Newton Basketball Court, Doris Hodge Tennis Courts, the Winston Raymo basketball courts, Estate Nadir Basketball Court, Ezra Fredericks basketball court, and the basketball courts in Estate Anna's Retreat have been resurfaced and relined. St. John's Cruz Bay Tennis Courts and Orville Brown Basketball Courts are completed. Pickleball lines were included in the restriping of the Cruz Bay Tennis Courts. In addition to the resurfacing, DSPR has installed new basketball backboards and rims at several courts throughout the territory.

Programs & Partnerships

DSPR continues to partner with various community service groups to administer programs to our community. On St. Thomas, the Department of Human Services (DHS) Head Start program utilizes several of our facilities for structured outdoor physical activity for their pre-schoolers. As customary, DSPR ensures our fields are prepped and lined so the Alvin McBean and Elrod Hendricks Little League games can play on safe and consistent surfaces.



Interscholastic Athletic Association (IAA) School Leagues also use DSPR facilities for gameplay. DSPR continues its partnership with the Salvation Army to provide after-school care and homework assistance from Monday thru Thursday at the Winston Raymo Center. We also offer a strength and conditioning program at that facility. Recently, DSPR wrapped up another successful six weeks of its Senior workout program at the Emancipation Garden. We plan to roll out this successful program again in late May.

For several years, after summer camp, we have been asked to continue offering dance instruction to our community's young men and young ladies. We proudly announce that DSPR has offered after-school dance classes at the Ulla F. Mulla Elementary School this school year. If you missed the class's performance at the 2023 Prince & Princess Selection Show or the Hospital Show, be sure to catch them tomorrow at the Toddler's Derby. Thank you to the Department of Tourism's Division of Festivals for allowing our girls to showcase their talent and hard work.

With the addition of the National Park Ballfield to the Department's inventory, we can now offer more recreational opportunities on the island of St. John. The territory witnessed the Women's Fastpitch Qualifier Softball tournament just last month. Baseball players aged 8 - 12 have started practicing at the new field twice a week, and upcoming girls' softball games are scheduled for young ladies ages 18 and under.

The Big Island's DSPR Co-ed Governmental Softball League is preparing for its playoff run, and a new Performing Arts program at the DC Canegata facility is proving to be very popular. In addition to several successful tennis clinics, the basketball clinics held at the Emile "Gravy" Henderson Sports Courts are also well attended, and participation at our Senior Workout at the Altona lagoon continues to grow.

DSPR's second-largest program, the territorial Reviving Baseball in our Inner Cities (RBI) Program, has successfully allowed interisland play for our baseball and softball players in the territory for the past two years.

DSPR's Recreation Team eagerly anticipates offering a Domino Tournament, the second installation of our Rugrats Track and Field program, and our co-ed Governmental Softball League in the St. Thomas district. The team is also finalizing Senior's Bingo Night and Family Bingo on all three islands.



In the next few weeks, the focus of the Department will be its most sizeable program, SUMMER CAMP. This year the territory will see its highly anticipated summer camp in each district beginning June 12 – July 21, with a fee of \$150 for the entire six-week program. We look forward to seeing all our children back in camp again this year. DSPR Summer Camp creates a safe space for hundreds of children around the territory to participate in various recreational activities. Varying from baseball to football, to arts and crafts, dance, and more! The most important point about DSPR summer camp is the program's affordability. DSPR will release additional information on our summer camp program shortly after the St. Thomas carnival season.

DSPR's commitment to our youth beyond athletics is exemplified in our partnership with Align Community. The launch of the CHOICES Mentoring Program this March, based on the MENTOR National model, will allow youth throughout the territory to be paired with mentors to assist in navigating life's most critical journey. The decisions made by our youth through middle school and high school will affect the trajectory of their life, and the additional guidance will provide lifelong benefits.

Utilizing a grant that the Department applied for and received through the Law Enforcement Planning Commission (LEPC), this program requires a minimum of a one-year commitment from both mentee and mentor. A minimum of four contact hours per month will help to solidify the relationship and provide the youth with a trusted adult to journey with them. The intentional investment of time given by the volunteer mentors demonstrates to the youth of our community that they are significant and that their future is the community's concern. Monthly mentoring workshops conducted at DSPR facilities allow program facilitators to monitor the mentoring relationships and provide guidance on strategies to enhance the mentoring relationship.

Studies show that children involved in healthy mentoring relationships are less likely to abandon school and have contact with the criminal justice system. As the Commissioner of this Department, I understand that every child does not want to dribble a basketball or swing a bat; DSPR should still find a way to assist them in living a full life. Recreation goes beyond athletic competition and physical fitness; recreation should be enjoyed with good relationships and other enriching activities. With the violence we are experiencing in our

communities today, a Mentoring program is not only timely but a perfect fit for the direction of DSPR.

We want our community's children to know they are not alone. They should know that aside from their parents, others in the community are concerned about their overall well-being and are willing to put the time in to help them achieve their goals. A decrease in youth delinquency, an increase in high school completion, and an overall greater sense of community are some of the core goals of the CHOICES Mentoring Program. Currently, we have 25 mentors registered in the St. Thomas district and eight in the St. Croix district. I want to thank LEPC for awarding this grant to DSPR so that this program can be successful. I also want to thank Adryann Glenn and his team at Align Community for their knowledge, passion, and partnership.

I want to also thank AARP for their willingness to partner with DSPR on various projects. In addition to constructing the AARP FitLot at the Altona Lagoon in St. Croix, AARP has offered to supply benches constructed and engraved by My Brother's Workshop. These benches will be placed at several DSPR facilities in the St. Thomas district. Another community partner that I am proud to partner with is the St. Croix Environmental Association. If you are in the Frederiksted area, please pass by the Vern Richards Park and take a look at the environmental education interactive art piece created by Ms. Olivia Walton and her group of local students. The art piece depicts some of our local endangered animals and plants.

DSPR and Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) have partnered to bring training and education to help establish a positive, character-building experience for youth athletes. The programs are created from a Positive Youth Development perspective and built around the framework of Social Emotional Learning. Partnerships with PCA put a purposeful focus on two forms of Character: Performance Character and Moral Character. Coach Appreciation and Training Workshops will be held at Castle Burk Center on St. Croix, Saturday, April 22, 2023 and at the Winston Raymo Center on St. Thomas on Sunday, April 23, 2023.

Another initiative I am thrilled to tell you about is the installation of 20 solar powered workstations at DSPR facilities territory wide utilizing funding through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA). Currently, the constructor is prepping the sites and awaiting permits for the installation of 20 quality manufactured solar workstations.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

One of the strengths that remain throughout this Department is our ability to be flexible and adjust. Although many of our facilities are under construction, my team continues to produce programs. You can witness multiple activities going on at the same time. The staff has yet to use “lack of facilities” as an excuse not to offer quality programming. Further proof of our flexibility was demonstrated when we offered virtual summer camps during the pandemic.

Our weakness continues to be the need for more resources. In the Bryan Roach administration’s first four years, DSPR has done an excellent job closing the gap and filling the need for the equipment required to carry out its mandate. We have made significant strides in procuring much-needed equipment to help meet our mandates. We recently procured and received 2500 new trucks for our newly hired employees. A total of five 2500 Silverado trucks were purchased. One for the island of St John, one for the island of St Thomas, and three for the island of St. Croix. These vehicles were timely, as now we can assign our employees to cover more locations throughout the islands. Vehicles for the grounds crew, and heavy equipment, such as the John Deer tractor, backhoe attachments, beach cleaning equipment, and bush whips, were purchased for both districts. I intend to include a request for additional equipment in the Department’s proposed fiscal year 2024 budget.

We continue to promote new and fun programs for all ages, and with new facilities coming online, we have the opportunity for additional staffing. Although staffing is a challenge for this Department, the Human Resources office has done an excellent job seeking to hire energetic, qualified individuals. We continue to seek diverse individuals who can bring fresh and innovative ideas to our Department. But the demand for reliable, action-oriented, and passionate team members is growing.

With several of our recovery projects beginning active construction within the next two months, a major threat for this Department is increasing prices realized in the supply chain for the materials needed to repair our facilities and the need for adequate funding to satisfy those costs. Often, these costs are over and beyond the FEMA grant funding obligated, and the Department is responsible for the remaining costs.



DSPR's Role in the 2023 St. Thomas Carnival

The relationship between the Department of Tourism's Division of Festivals and DSPR is based on the use of DSPR facilities. Unfortunately, the facilities typically requested, Lionel Robert's Stadium, and Emile Griffith Park, were unavailable to the Division of Festivals this year because they are active construction sites.

I want to thank the men and women of the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation who come to work, day in and day out, to make a difference in the people of the territory's lives. The individuals who work long, late hours and who do so with a sense of pride. I genuinely appreciate and thank every employee in this Department.

Thank you, this concludes my testimony. I stand ready to answer any questions you may have.