

Testimony of Christopher W. Richardson
Bill No. 35-0239 Presented to The Committee on Government Operations,
Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection
of the 35th Legislature of the US Virgin Islands

June 28, 2024

Good day, Honorable Senator Carla J. Joseph; Chair of the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, Esteemed Members of the Committee of the 35th Legislature of the US Virgin Islands, and the listening and viewing audiences.

My name is Chris Richardson. It is my honor to appear before the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, to offer testimony in support of Bill No. 35-0239– An Act honoring and commending Mrs. Claire Lorraine Brown Roker for her dedicated service to the Virgin Islands community by naming the visitors center at the Ann E. Abramson Marine Facility, St. Croix, Virgin Islands, the “Claire L. Roker Visitors Center.”

My partner, Ted Bedwell, and I moved to St. Croix in November of 2016 after many years of vacationing at Sand Castle on the Beach in Frederiksted. After taking over ownership of the resort we began meeting people and neighbors in our community. Little did we know the impact one of those neighbors, a seemingly tiny unassuming woman, would have on our lives. Ms. Claire Roker lives just a couple of houses down from the hotel. We would often see her when she would come by for lunch or dinner and exchange pleasantries and talk about neighborhood things in general. We were still quite unaware of who we were getting to know.

Then a hurricane named Maria blew through, changing our lives and relationships in a big way. The day prior to the hurricane’s arrival, Claire called recommending we bring our personal vehicles to her home, as it is higher up on a hill and would provide a little more safety. We immediately decided to take her up on this generous offer knowing she probably had a little more experience with storms than us! Once Maria passed over and we started assessing damages, we checked on Claire to see how she and her home had fared the storm. Like many, her home sustained quite a lot of damage and as a result we made accommodations for her and her family to stay at the resort with us. This resulted in the creation of a deep family bond between Claire and Ted and me. This time allowed us to get to know just what an inspiring powerhouse of a woman, ally, friend, mentor and leader Ms. Claire Roker is.

Claire's ability to finesse situations and navigate personalities and opinions is astonishing. We are inspired by her tireless efforts to be a good community citizen, an incredible friend with a kind word and shoulder to lean on and a fierce work ethic. As new citizens of our community, Claire took our hand and helped us to understand the local culture and introduced us to many traditions, always encouraging us to get involved in helping to elevate others and do the right thing by people. Her perspective has not only inspired us but also has made us aspire to emulate her and her incredible drive and determination.

Claire, because of the generous person she is, has created this ability to make people want to do anything she asks of them! I know this sounds funny, but truly it is very hard if not impossible to say no to her! Fortunately, I always want to say yes to her because everything she promotes or supports is always a worthy cause, whether it is fundraising for cancer awareness and research, spearheading projects such as the Midre-Cummings children's park renovation, advocating for Rotary West and the values Rotary embraces or the countless other initiatives she puts her heart and soul into. This is what I want my life to be and look like when I grow up! A life of great satisfaction due to dedication, commitment, perseverance and good old hard work! That is why I am deeply honored to speak to you today on behalf of this extraordinary woman.

If you know her, or even know of her, then you probably are already very aware of why she is so deserving of this honor to memorialize her name. She embodies hospitality which is why it is so appropriate that her name be associated with the Visitors Center, welcoming EVERYONE to her beloved home of St.Croix.

I want to thank this committee for honoring and supporting this lovely recognition for my extraordinary friend and esteemed member of my chosen family, Claire Roker.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chris Richardson

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