



CHANT

March 5, 2025

# Crucian Heritage and Nature Tourism, Inc.

#217 Custom House Street

Frederiksted, St. Croix, US Virgin Islands 00840

**Telephone:** (340) 277-4834 Email: [info@chantvi.org](mailto:info@chantvi.org)

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Senator Kurt A. Violet

Chairman

36th Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands

Committee on Education and Workforce Development

#3022 Estate Golden Rock

Christiansted St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands 00820

Good Day Chairman Senator Kurt Violet,

Senator Avery L. Lewis, Vice Chair

Committee Members:

Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff,

Senator Kenneth L. Gittens,

Senator Marise C. James,

Senator Franklin D. Johnson,

Senator Carla Joseph

Thank you for the invitation to testify to the Committee on Education and Workforce Development on behalf of the Board of Directors, staff and constituents of Crucian Heritage and Nature Tourism, Inc. – CHANT.

CHANT's mission is to promote, preserve, and conserve the built and natural environment of St. Croix and the Virgin Islands, and to serve as a catalyst for sustainable tourism development. Focusing on development from within, CHANT's heritage and nature tourism program and traditional building arts programs serve as an engine for sustainable economic development, contributing to a new era of increased broad-based prosperity and community pride. Our project, Invisible Heritage and the Building Arts Program is a creative placemaking/placekeeping project that provides training for underserved youth in woodworking and masonry and, the restoration of a vernacular dwelling in the town of Frederiksted. Our Project is an intervention crafted to meet our communities' concrete needs for habitable buildings and viable employment. Community centered approaches anchored in the local dynamics are utilized to activate these neglected and abandoned spaces, invigorate understanding of our rich heritage and provide youth with opportunities for personal and professional growth in our community.

CHANT launched our fifth series of six-week Introduction to Woodworking Workforce training program and concurrent community workshops May 8<sup>th</sup> – June 21st, 2024. Originally scheduled for 4 weeks, the workshops were extended due to popular demand. Nine (9) young men ages 18-27 enrolled in the program and six (6) successfully completed the program. The students received introductory training and progressed to intermediate training during the last two weeks. The Community workshops reached fifteen (15) individuals during the six-week program where they were introduced to the lathe – pen turning and turning bowls, and created tabletops, cutting boards and other items.



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CHANT applied for Historic Preservation funding through the Virgin Islands State Historic Preservation Office for the restoration of #38 Hospital Street, Frederiksted, VI. The grant was awarded on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024, in the amount of \$159,139 for phase 1 of the project (Bldg. 1). Having the support from Island Spirit Fund, the Federal Home Loan Band of New York and the St. Croix Foundation for Community Development, we were able to meet the requirement for working capital that this project required, we began the work On June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

Six trainees transferred to the construction project as apprentices under the leadership of Afreekan Southwell as the Project Manager. The job entailed the cleaning of the property, demolition and restoration of building one and the fabrication of replacement historical elements including shutters, window openings and porch railings. The team completed 90% of the restoration by September 30<sup>th</sup>, the original SHPO deadline. Congress approved extension of the grant and the work will be completed by the end of October. Currently two trainees are completing the “finishing work” on Building 1 and restoration of Building 2 is underway. In partnership with the founder of the American College of the Building Arts located in Charleston, SC, a replica of a “long row” has been fabricated by students and graduates of the college and is currently in route to St. Croix. On March 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, we invite you to visit the site to see the installation of the “long row” by our apprentices and students of ACBA.

CHANT has forged new partnerships in the environmental sector with the VI Department of Planning and Natural Resources and The Nature Conservancy for the implementation of a workforce training program and the development of the Virgin Islands Conservation Corps. In April we will be launching the VI Conservation Corps training program. The Project Objectives are: Develop a USVI Climate Corp to train and employ young adults (ages 18-30) from the local community to implement projects such as mangrove restoration, sediment reduction, stormwater run-off management, development and maintenance, coastal trail development, marine debris removal and many other projects to build economic sustainability in this under-served population. The first training cohort will serve 10 to 15 young adults.