

STM

ST. THOMAS MAJORETTES, INC.

MAKES 20

The STM Experience



ST. THOMAS MAJORETTES, INC.

LOVE IT. DO IT. LIVE IT. TWIRL!

ST. THOMAS MAJORETTES, INC.
PRESENTED ON OCTOBER 19, 2026
DR. DESHA S. POWELL, CO-FOUNDER



October 7, 2026

The Honorable Avery L. Lewis, Chairman
Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection
36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall
P.O. Box 1600
St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands 00804

RE: Written Testimony in Support of Bill No. 36-0327

(A Resolution Honoring and Commending the St. Thomas Majorettes)

Dear Chairman Lewis:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide formal testimony in support of Bill No. 36-0327, proposed by Senator Milton E. Potter, and sponsored by, Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr. honoring and commending the St. Thomas Majorettes for their twenty years of dedication and service to the territory.

Enclosed, please find the prepared testimony along with accompanying documentation for the official legislative record.

Thank you and the members of the committee for your continued leadership and unwavering support of community stewardship.

Respectfully submitted,

Desha S. Powell, Ph.D.
St. Thomas Majorettes, Inc.

Good morning, Committee Chairman Avery Lewis, Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection, distinguished members of the committee, other members of the 36th Legislature in attendance, and the listening and viewing audience.

My name is Dr. Desha S. Powell, co-founder of the St. Thomas Majorettes, affectionately known as STM. On behalf of our entire organization, we are deeply grateful for this recognition and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to share our vision, mission, and community impact.

Joining me today are:

- Meki'ya Thomas, former majorette and current trainer;
- Sheldon Turnbull, radio personality and event host; and
- Raynette Cameron, Director of VI Ray of Sunshine, Inc.

Empowering Young Girls Through Discipline, Leadership, and Community

St. Thomas Majorettes, Inc. (STM) provides positive recreation and enrichment opportunities for young girls between the ages of 4 and 17, occasionally welcoming curious toddlers ages 1 to 3 into introductory movement and participation.

Baton twirling is far more than a performance art—it is an athletic discipline that develops teamwork, leadership, self-discipline, hand-eye coordination, poise, concentration, and sustained focus. It builds self-esteem as our youth learn to perform with confidence and humility, while mastering the ability to recover from mistakes with grace.

Through STM, our members cultivate commitment, hard work, perseverance, responsibility, and resilience. Most importantly, the organization provides a safe, nurturing environment that actively supports their mental, physical, emotional, and social well-being.

While the St. Thomas Majorettes are widely celebrated for our vibrant appearances in annual Carnival parades, STM is an active, year-round youth development organization. Our members perform by invitation at churches, civic functions, community showcases, cultural pageants, and memorial services. Beyond the baton, they engage in structured skill-building workshops, character-building social outings, and receive academic support when needed—fostering lifelong friendships, mutual accountability, and a strong sense of family.

The Beginning of St. Thomas Majorettes, Inc.

St. Thomas Majorettes, Inc. was founded in January 2006 by cousins Patricia A. Thomas and Dr. Desha S. Powell, with the dedicated support of family members including Ina Christian, Carolyn Hansen, and the late Abigail Amaro and Valencia Christian.

What began as an idea and a commitment to young girls would grow into an organization that has touched the lives of generations of young women throughout the Virgin Islands.

The Twirler, The Performer, The Drill Sergeant, The Visionary, The Backbone

Ms. Patricia Thomas has been a dedicated twirler for much of her life. She began as a member of the PMP (Housing) Majorettes and later joined the Sebastians Majorettes, where she twirled and trained for many years. She also provided twirling instruction each summer at the Lutheran Church of the Reformation Summer Camp.

As a young girl, Pat, affectionately known by so many, wanted to dance and twirl. She would perform to the latest songs around the house, put on shows at family events, and could often be found with a baton in her hand, spinning and marching. Having to choose between formal dance lessons and twirling, that decision would ultimately become a defining part of her life's legacy.

Pat has since become the co-founder of STM! She is a leader, choreographer, and life coach to her girls. She is renowned for structure, unison, pride, and precision. **She also welcomes friendly competition.** Her dedication to her girls goes far beyond twirling; her goal is to keep future generations focused, involved, and community-oriented.

The Non-Twirler Story

My journey took a different path. Rather than twirling myself, I channeled my creativity behind the scenes, helping bring the story to life.

While working at Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School on St. Thomas, I answered a knock at my classroom door. Standing outside was Roniqua Webster, a student I had never taught.

"Miss, you look like you like children," Roniqua said. "Can you start a majorette group at the school?"

Although I had no baton-twirling experience and initially hesitated, I agreed to take on the challenge. I loved planning and organizing, and I knew the right people to turn this idea into reality. My first move was enlisting the help of Patricia Thomas and Yolanda Lewis.

Despite the challenges of balancing other commitments, both women stepped up to assist. Soon, my middle school twirlers made their way up the parade route. They were not perfectly synchronized, but they marched, twirled, and danced with pride—representing the BCB Blazers and demonstrating a strong sense of culture and community. It was the beginning of something special.

Today, I am proud to share that little Roniqua went on to become an STM Twirler, and she now serves our community as a counselor in the public school system.

So, to answer the question of how a non-twirler like me became interested in creating a majorette organization: it went far beyond my knack for organizing. It was rooted in a deep love for our children and a desire to see them succeed. When you pair that heart with complete faith in our Director and an incredible, collaborative team, you get a partnership that has proudly stood strong for twenty years.

Fun Fact

Both Pat and I are proud mothers of sons. Throughout the years, these young men have stood firmly behind our passion and vision for the St. Thomas Majorettes. Their encouragement, hands-on help, and unwavering support have been an essential chapter of our organization's story. Like so many other young men who stepped up to help, they will forever be an integral part of the STM family.

While many "little brothers" have woven themselves into our legacy, I want to take a moment to honor Aaron Nicholas Ashby—an energetic, curious, and remarkably talented young man whose life was cut tragically short. Aaron spent countless afternoons and evenings by our side, and his spirit will always remain a cherished part of our STM family.

The Flavor of St. Thomas Majorettes

The BCB group was young, energetic, and full of promise—but I knew that something special was still missing.

I remembered the unique flavor, precision, and discipline I had witnessed when Pat trained young girls through the Lutheran Church of the Reformation Summer Camp. Once again, I approached Pat and asked if she would assist our school-based group.

Scheduling conflicts initially made it difficult, but sometimes destiny has a way of creating its own schedule. Pat eventually made the decision to establish her own baton-twirling organization.

Patricia's passion for twirling merged with my commitment to empowering young girls, and St. Thomas Majorettes, Inc. was born.

There was only one thing missing: a place to practice.

We approached Dr. Stefan Jurgen about allowing our group to use the Edith Williams Alternative Academy's schoolyard as our practice site. With his shared commitment to seeing youth excel and recognizing that baton twirling provides a positive, constructive outlet, he gladly agreed. The dream was becoming a reality.

Pat and I then reached out to friends, family, and community members with young daughters, encouraging them to get involved so our organization could make its official debut in 2006.

Through hard work, perseverance, and boundless enthusiasm, forty-one faithful members including three mascots became the charter members of St. Thomas Majorettes.

Our first official member was none other than Little Miss Meki'ya Thomas, who led our Junior Group and remained with the organization all the way through her senior year of high school.

Meki'ya later used the confidence and skills she developed to become Ms. Kappa Alpha Psi at Bethune-Cookman University. Upon returning home, she immediately gave back to our organization, stepping into a new role as a trainer for the Advanced Intermediate Group. Today, Meki'ya serves our community as a counselor at Lockhart Elementary School.

Her journey is one of the many examples of what St. Thomas Majorettes hopes to accomplish: developing young girls who grow into accomplished women who return to lift the next generation.

Alongside Pat and me for many years was our beloved cousin, the late Jiffany Richards, who served faithfully as a trainer for the Junior Group. Jiffany was also the proud mother of Jikelle Michaels, one of our former STM Majorettes, who went on to represent our island as both Carnival Princess and Carnival Queen.

The Legacy Continues

For 20 years, St. Thomas Majorettes has continued to grow and leave its mark on the Virgin Islands community. That legacy has been made possible by countless individuals who have poured their time, talent, resources, and love into our organization.

First and foremost, we recognize our dedicated Board Members, Alicia Gumbs and Brenda Monsanto.

Alicia and Brenda began their journey with St. Thomas Majorettes as majorette mothers. While their daughters have since grown into successful, proud Virgin Islands women, Alicia and Brenda continue to return year after year to champion our mission. Their commitment is a testament to the fact that once you become a part of the STM family, you never truly leave.

Similarly, upon returning to the Virgin Islands, Dr. Linda Callwood stepped in to support her sister, Pat, and our organization by providing sponsorship, technical expertise, and artistic creativity. Her contributions have helped the organization continue to present itself with creativity, beauty, and the highest standard of professionalism.

Behind the Scenes: Developing the Whole Girl

Our commitment has always extended far beyond performances, parades, and community appearances. We believe wholeheartedly in developing the whole girl.

To us, that means creating purposeful opportunities that cultivate health, education, personal character, leadership, career exploration, and a deep understanding of each girl's value within our community.

Through our healthy-eating workshops, we educate our girls on nutrition, balanced habits, and the lifelong value of wellness. We want them to understand that nurturing their physical health is fundamental to growing into strong, confident, capable women.

Equally vital is preparing them for the future. We created signature initiatives like the Misses and Mingle Career Fair to expose our girls to diverse professions and possibilities. Through these direct engagements, they meet accomplished women, ask probing questions, discover emerging career paths, and envision their own potential. Often, all a young girl needs is to see someone who looks like her thriving in a profession to know that she can achieve it too.

Empowering Through Education and Life Skills

Another vital pillar of our programming is our annual workshop series, which we host in partnership with local social workers and community professionals.

These sessions create a safe, supportive space for our girls to ask real questions, navigate personal challenges, and build practical life skills. Over the years, our workshops have addressed core issues directly shaping youth development, including healthy relationships, anti-bullying, time management, self-esteem, conflict resolution, and personal accountability.

For me, delivering this social-emotional guidance and teaching responsible decision-making is every bit as critical as teaching our girls the discipline and routines of a performance.

The Measure of Our Success: Our Alumni

For me, one of the greatest rewards of co-founding the St. Thomas Majorettes is witnessing who our girls become long after they leave the parade route.

Our former twirlers have gone on to thrive as doctors, lawyers, educators, counselors, technology specialists, entrepreneurs, and civic mentors across our community and beyond.

What touches my heart even more deeply is seeing so many of these accomplished young women return home to pour their time and talents back into the very organization that helped shape them. Because of them the legacy continues.

A shining example of that enduring legacy is the King Image Award, established by Nakayla King.

This award was established by one of our former twirlers to invest directly in the educational future of the next generation. Through the King Image Award, a graduating senior receives a

book scholarship to ease the financial burden of college as they begin their higher education journey.

Consider the power of that cycle: a young girl arrived at St. Thomas Majorettes, was lifted up by our mentorship, discipline, and community support, went out into the world and thrived, and then returned with open hands to lift up the young woman walking in her footsteps.

That is the true return on investment of this organization.

Our Trainers and Support Team

Behind every performance are countless unseen hours of hard work.

Behind every routine are dedicated trainers who sacrifice their evenings and weekends; selfless volunteers transporting our children, organizing logistics, coordinating fundraisers, and managing events; and patient mentors offering comfort and encouragement whenever a young girl feels frustrated or ready to give up.

We would be remiss if we did not pause to express our deepest gratitude to the extraordinary trainers, volunteers, sponsors, parents, family members, and community supporters who have sustained the St. Thomas Majorettes over the past two decades—most notably our steadfast STM Parent Boosters Club.

Our legacy of giving back is reflected in our former and visiting trainers including Sekoia Rogers, Esq., Delanni Matthew, Niechelle Wheatley, D'Shae Xavier, To'Quoya George, Radiant Toussaint, Ne'Keyla Amey, Nakayla King and every one of whom began their journey as a twirler in our ranks.

Today, that same torch is carried by our dedicated team of current trainers: Lorie Weeks, Rita Joseph, Jacqueline Alexander, Roxanne Setorie, Jaunelle Setorie, Dominique Hendricks, Yolande Lewis, Sandra Smith, Yolanda Lewis Dyer, and She-Miyah Royer, along with Meki'ya Thomas, Rayshana Blake, and Ceara Donald, who also once proudly marched the parade route as STM twirlers.

Behind the Decorations

We also recognize Carolyn Hansen, Harolyn Hansen, and Tessa Baker, whose hands-on creativity in decorating our signature props, designing our parade floats, and elevating our visual presentations has helped bring the STM vision to vibrant life year after year.

Special thanks as well to Dr. Linda Callwood, Theodora Manners, and Wendell Lincoln, who work tirelessly constructing the props and sets that turn our imaginative concepts into reality.

Their ingenuity, craftsmanship, and countless hours of physical labor behind the scenes give our performances that distinctive magic and polished look that audiences have come to love and celebrate across the Virgin Islands.

The Men of STM

Let us not forget the Men of STM—the muscles behind the organization.

They are fathers, brothers, cousins, uncles, grandfathers, and constant supporters who step up whenever they are needed.

Michael Thomas and his team of men in white continue to assist with the props that are displayed and used during performances each year.

Their work requires strength, coordination, preparation, practice, and teamwork.

They are often behind the scenes, but their contributions are very much a visible part of the success of our performances.

Elvin Brooks serves as our master chef, keeping our STM family well-fed and energized through every marathon practice, performance, and event. Beyond the kitchen, Elvin is our operational backbone—coordinating trucks, managing heavy logistics, and ensuring all our equipment, supplies, and transportation needs are executed seamlessly during special events and parade routes.

Sponsors, Patrons, Parents, Family, and Friends

We want to pause to recognize and sincerely thank the many sponsors and supporters who have stood steadfastly with the St. Thomas Majorettes throughout the years.

In particular, we honor the following individuals and their families: Joyce Hansen, Charlene Brathwaite, Arlene Blackman, Carmen Wheatley, Lorie Weeks, and the late June Hansen.

We also extend our deepest appreciation to the Virgin Islands Department of Education, which for the past twenty years has generously provided us with space to practice, host workshops, conduct meetings, and carry out our full mission. Having a reliable home has been invaluable to our sustainability—providing our young ladies with a safe, welcoming environment where they can build lasting bonds, sharpen their talents, and truly thrive.

We also extend our sincere appreciation to the leadership, principals, teachers, and staff of the Lockhart K-8 School and the Julius E. Sprauve School. Each administrator of these campuses have recognized the significance of our contributions and extended their support. We could not have done this without your support over the years.

A Celebration of Service and Impact

Today, I am proud to bear witness to this milestone recognition.

When you support St. Thomas Majorettes, you are supporting much more than a performance organization.

You are investing in a mission that empowers, educates, mentors, and inspires young girls to become confident, disciplined, healthy, and well-rounded women—young women who know their worth, realize their potential, and stand ready to lead within their families, their communities, and our Virgin Islands.

For twenty years, we have watched little girls walk through our doors with batons in their hands and dreams in their hearts—and we have watched them emerge as leaders.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the sponsors of Bill No. 36-0327: Senate President Milton Potter, Senator Angel Bolques, and Senator Avery Lewis and his team, as well as every esteemed member of this committee, for recognizing the enduring value of the St. Thomas Majorettes and honoring our journey today.

On behalf of our co-founders, trainers, board members, volunteers, parents, alumni, current twirlers, sponsors, and the entire STM family:

Thank you for believing in our girls.

Thank you for believing in our mission.

Thank you for believing in our legacy.

And above all—

Thank you for believing in the bright future of the young women of the Virgin Islands.

Photo Gallery





