

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen of the 36th Legislature.

I am Sandra M. Benjamin, retired VIDE Educator of 38 years, a Union Member, a Board Member, and an Executive Board Member of the St. Thomas – St. John American Federation of Teachers.

I would like to thank this Senate Body, especially Senator Angel Bolquez, Jr. and Senator Avery L. Lewis, for honoring our colleague and friend, Mr. Austin M. Petersen.

For 36 years Mr. Peterson has devoted his life to the arts and has shared his knowledge and craft with the children of St. Thomas.

I officially met Mr. Petersen some months ago while assisting Mrs. Marva Thomas Lake and Mr. Alyster Edwards with their retirement journey. He became our constant source of encouragement, laughter, and wisdom. He also shared the journey of “The Wall” Black Utopia Lane, which originated in 1982.

His kindness has a way of making the toughest days feel lighter. We admire his strength and compassion for the work he’s doing, and for showing up for our community, which he cares for.

Mr. Petersen and all the painters’ you guys are “Simply the Best”. Thank you, Black Utopia Lane is not just a beautification for the area; it's our history.

“A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots.”

- Marcus Garvey

With all Our Respect and Affection. Thank you and Blessings.

Sincerely,