

**BILL NO. 35-0239**

**Thirty-Fifth Legislature of the Virgin Islands**

**February 28, 2024**

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”

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**PROPOSED BY:** Senators Novelle E. Francis, Jr. and Javan E. James Sr.

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1       **WHEREAS**, Claire Lorraine Brown Roker was born on April 13, 1938, at Frederiksted  
2 Hospital, Frederiksted St. Croix, Virgin Islands;

3       **WHEREAS**, Claire is the third child born to Wilhelmina Jackson Brown and Henry  
4 David Brown;

5       **WHEREAS**, prior to her family’s move to the United States mainland, Claire attended  
6 the St. Patrick’s Catholic School in Frederiksted until the third grade;

7       **WHEREAS**, in 1956, Claire graduated from Andrew Jackson High School, in Queens,  
8 New York;

9       **WHEREAS**, after Claire graduated from high school, she held several administrative  
10 positions—including, at the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) as secretary, and

1 worked for Foot Flair Shoes as a receptionist on the 69<sup>th</sup> floor of the Empire State Building in  
2 New York City, New York;

3 **WHEREAS**, Claire earned credits in business administration and accounting at the  
4 College of the Virgin Islands;

5 **WHEREAS**, Claire met Christian “Wally” Waldermar Roker at the Bernice Johnson  
6 Dance School in New York City;

7 **WHEREAS**, Claire married Wally Roker in November of 1958;

8 **WHEREAS**, Claire’s interest in and love for the entertainment and tourism industries  
9 grew tremendously through her work assisting Wally“, a member of the original Heartbeats  
10 singing group, in the production end of the music business industry;

11 **WHEREAS**, Claire had opportunities to meet, interact and travel with performers  
12 including the Isley Brothers, Dionne Warwick, Burt Bacharach, Nat King Cole and the  
13 Shirelles;

14 **WHEREAS**, Claire is the mother of three daughters, Chrystal Michelle Roker Clendinen  
15 (now deceased), Laura Renee Roker Tibbs, and Chyrise Lorraine Davis Eleonora, and the  
16 grandmother of five and the great-grandmother of seven;

17 **WHEREAS**, in 1964, Claire visited St. Croix and introduced her two eldest children to  
18 their paternal grandparents Christian and Christina Henneman;

19 **WHEREAS**, with Wally traveling internationally and there being an excellent support  
20 system at home, Mrs. Roker decided to stay on St. Croix with her mother Wilhelmina Jackson  
21 Brown and her maternal aunt, the well-known educator Delta Minvera Jackson Dorsch;

22 **WHEREAS**, in January 1965, Claire started employment as a Passenger Service  
23 Representative with Pan American Airlines until the company left the territory in 1975;

1           **WHEREAS**, in 1975, Claire was employed as a Travel Agent for Farrelly’s Travel  
2 Agency, St. Croix;

3           **WHEREAS**, in 1978, Claire successfully opened Roker’s Travel & Tours Agency  
4 influenced by Delta Dorsch’s community work with the Business and Professional Women’s  
5 organization and mentoring by educators and professional women, including Business and  
6 Professional Women member Octavia Ross and Evelyn Williams, part owner of Roker’s  
7 Travel;

8           **WHEREAS**, from 1982 to 1987, Mrs. Roker was employed at Cruzan Rum as Pavilion  
9 Manager and Tour Manager;

10          **WHEREAS**, on February 9, 1987, Mrs. Roker was appointed by Governor Alexander  
11 Farrelly and Lt. Governor Derek M. Hodge as Assistant Director of Tourism under  
12 Commissioner of Tourism Eric Dawson and Assistant Commissioner of Tourism Leona  
13 Bryant;

14          **WHEREAS**, in her time as Assistant Director of Tourism, Mrs. Roker brought the  
15 Smithsonian’s 1990 Festival of American Folklife to the island of St. Croix, featuring Virgin  
16 Islands history and culture and that of the people of Senegal, West Africa;

17          **WHEREAS**, on February 18, 1991, Mrs. Roker was appointed as Director of Tourism;

18          **WHEREAS**, on August 29, 1994, Mrs. Roker was promoted to Assistant Commissioner  
19 of Tourism by the Farrelly-Hodge administration;

20          **WHEREAS**, from 1997 to 2005, Mrs. Roker was Office Manager for Virgin Islands  
21 Delegate to Congress Donna Christian-Christensen;

1           **WHEREAS**, Mrs. Roker served as Senator Ronald Russell’s Community Outreach  
2 Coordinator from his first term in the 25th Legislature until he became President of the 29th  
3 Legislature, at which time she became his Office Manager;

4           **WHEREAS**, in the 1970’s, Mrs. Roker developed an interest in the politics of the  
5 territory;

6           **WHEREAS**, in 1974, Mrs. Roker volunteered as a campaign helper and manager for the  
7 late Atty. Derek M. Hodge who successfully ran for St. Croix District Chairman of the  
8 Democratic Party;

9           **WHEREAS**, in 1982, Mrs. Roker was a campaign volunteer with the Derek Hodge  
10 campaign for Governor against Juan F. Luis. In 1984; she was a campaign volunteer for  
11 Hodge’s campaign for the Legislature of the Virgin Islands; and in 1986, she was a campaign  
12 volunteer for Alexander Farrelly and Derek Hodge’s campaign for Governor and Lt. Governor;

13           **WHEREAS**, in 2007, Mrs. Roker was elected as a delegate to the Virgin Islands 5th  
14 Constitutional Convention;

15           **WHEREAS**, Mrs. Roker has served as the Democratic Party Chair in the District of St.  
16 Croix;

17           **WHEREAS**, Mrs. Roker has dedicated over 60 years being engaged in the St. Croix  
18 community, taking part in community events, and volunteering;

19           **WHEREAS**, Mrs. Roker is recognized as the “Virgin Islands Queen Mother of  
20 Pageants”;

21           **WHEREAS**, in 1972, Mrs. Roker’s first venture into the world of pageantry, where she  
22 coordinated the Miss Black Teenage America-USVI;

1           **WHEREAS**, in 1972, she founded the Hal Jackson’s Virgin Islands Talented Teen  
2 Scholarship Competition and directed the pageant for 40 years, encouraging hundreds of girls  
3 and young women to showcase their talent on Virgin Islands stages and during international  
4 competition, bringing home five international crowns;

5           **WHEREAS**, Virgin Islands contestants have won other competitions and gained  
6 prominent positions in the public and private sectors all over the world;

7           **WHEREAS**, in 1999, Claire successfully brought the Hal Jackson’s Talented Teen  
8 International Competition to the Reichhold Center for the Arts on St. Thomas, after having  
9 brought the international pageant to St. Croix's Island Center in the late seventies. These  
10 scholarship competitions and pageants brought contestants, coaches, families, entertainers and  
11 production crews from the United States mainland, Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean to the  
12 Virgin Islands. Additionally, the local pageants became known for bringing well known  
13 television and stage entertainers to St Croix, including El DeBarge, Johnny Gill, Ralph Carter,  
14 Michelle Thomas, Sheryl Lee Ralph, New Edition, Patrice Rushen, and many others;

15           **WHEREAS**, from 1967-1971, 1973, 1975-1980, 1987, 1988, 1991, 1992, and 1995-  
16 2005 Mrs. Roker served as Miss St. Croix Pageant Chairperson;

17           **WHEREAS**, Mrs. Roker sent contestants and actively participated in the Smith Haynes  
18 Talent Competition in St. Kitts for 27 years, bringing home seven regional crowns; local  
19 contestants later went on to win or place in the top ten in competitions which included Miss  
20 Virgin Islands, Ms. Earth US Virgin Islands, Miss US Paradise Supranational, among others;

21           **WHEREAS**, Mrs. Roker was Executive Director and Coordinator of the Miss America  
22 Virgin Islands Outstanding Teens competition for 11 years with contestant placements in the  
23 top ten, and one America’s Choice Award Selection;

1           **WHEREAS**, Mrs. Roker has been involved in a variety of other mentoring roles as  
2 judges for various competitions over the years; her training and mentoring have helped many  
3 contestants win in school competitions, local competitions, national, regional, and international  
4 competitions, bringing global recognition to the United States Virgin Islands;

5           **WHEREAS**, Mrs. Roker has either volunteered, been a part of, or held leadership roles  
6 in organizations like Our Town Frederiksted, Rotary West of St. Croix, Midre A.Cummings  
7 Park Rehabilitation Project, Relay for Life, Women’s Coalition of St. Croix, Frederiksted  
8 Economic Development Association, St. Croix Chamber of Commerce, Girl Scouts of  
9 America, Virgin Islands Puerto Rican Friendship Committee, Virgin Islands Tourism Council  
10 Advisory Committee, Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority Board, and Ebony Fashion  
11 Fair Show, just to name a few;

12           **WHEREAS**, Mrs. Roker has been honored or recognized by various organizations to  
13 include the Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority as an Honorary Member in 1982, the Danny Glover  
14 Citizen Award, St. Croix Casper A. Holstein Lifetime Award, and Casper A. Holstein Service  
15 Above Self Award from St. Croix Center Stage, the Mario DeChabert Above and Beyond  
16 Award from the Frederiksted Economic Development Association, Haynes Smith, Ms.  
17 Caribbean Talented Teen Pageant 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Award for loyalty and commitment as a  
18 franchise holder, U.S. Virgin Islands Freshwater Association, Inc. Award for Community  
19 Service, Miss St Croix Pageant Legacy Award, Paul Harris Fellow Award from Rotary of St.  
20 Croix West, and the Stanley and the Ten Sleepless Knights Folklife Festival National Platform  
21 Award 2023 (175<sup>th</sup> Virgin Islands Emancipation Commemoration);

22           **WHEREAS**, from 1973-74, Mrs. Roker was the social life columnist for the St. Croix  
23 Herald Tribute for which Atty. Mario DeChabert was the owner and editor and one of the

1 originators and served as the coordinator for the Frederiksted Economic Development  
2 Association’s Sunset Jazz series of outdoor concerts; and

3 **WHEREAS**, from her involvement in tourism, politics, and her venture into pageantry,  
4 Mrs. Roker has always put her best foot forward in the interest of her community, her  
5 colleagues, and contestants; Now, Therefore,

6 *Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:*

7 **SECTION 1.** The Legislature of the Virgin Islands, on behalf of the people of the Virgin  
8 Islands, honors and commends Claire Lorraine Brown Roker for her dedicated service to the  
9 Virgin Islands community.

10 **SECTION 2.** The President of the Legislature or the President’s designee shall present  
11 a perma plaque copy of this Act to Claire Lorraine Brown Roker at an appropriate ceremony.

12 **SECTION 3.** The visitors center at the Ann E. Abramson Marine Facility, St. Croix,  
13 Virgin Islands, shall be named the “Claire L. Roker Visitors Center”.

14 **SECTION 4.** The sum of \$10,000 is appropriated in the fiscal year ending September  
15 30, 2024, from the General Fund of the Treasury of the Government of the Virgin Islands to  
16 the Virgin Islands Port Authority to erect appropriate signage in a prominent place bearing the  
17 inscription the “Claire L. Roker Visitors Center”. These funds remain available until expended.

18 **BILL SUMMARY**

19 An Act honoring and commending Mrs. Claire Lorraine Brown Roker for her dedicated  
20 service to the Virgin Islands community and names the visitors center at the Ann E. Abramson  
21 Marine Facility, St. Croix, Virgin Islands, the “Claire L. Roker Visitors Center”.

22 **BR23-0707/February 21, 2024/ PFA**