

The Virgin Islands Consortium

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Centennial Legacy Project Symposium Dubbed, ‘In Search of Identity’ to Revitalize the Jose Antonio Jarvis Elementary School

ST. THOMAS — Over twenty government, non-profit, and community stakeholders clarified the scope, sustainability, and organizational structure needed to revitalize the Jose Antonio Jarvis Elementary School and Complex during a three-day symposium that wrapped up Monday at the Capitol Building on St. Thomas, according to a release issued by the 32nd Legislature.

Hosted by the Office of Senate President Myron D. Jackson, phase two of the “Centennial Legacy Project/In Search of Identity” hashed out several details and fostered a shared commitment to transform the Hospital Ground landmark into a cultural corridor to include a Virgin Islands Museum, Civic/Cultural Center, and Apprenticeship Learning Center. A similar symposium will begin on Tuesday on St. Croix to discuss the rehabilitation of the Old Military Barracks in Christiansted into an Academy of Architecture, Building Crafts and Cultural Heritage, the release said.

Guest presenters included Mr. Jackson, architects Brian Turnbull, Hildegunn Gronningssaeter, Stacey Bourne, Ulla Lunn, engineer Sergio Fox, and David McDonald, and Nadine Marchena Kean.

“In Search of Identity” began long before the concept of the Centennial. It has been effective leading up to the Centennial. It began with the aspect of who we are in the Virgin Islands and the issue of identity. For decades, we have struggled with this,” Mr. Jackson said. “The last three days we talked about the concept of preserving the J. Antonio Jarvis School in its original state and revitalizing it into a museum that teaches history, industrial arts, cultural arts and cabinet making.”

According to the release, some of the areas discussed with stakeholders included the dynamics of identity, the transfer of the Virgin Islands from Denmark to the United States, collaboration with the Danish West Indian Society and other organizations, and ways to re-purpose the J. Antonio Jarvis School into a museum.

“The Danish Government with matching funds from the U.S.V.I. was contributing \$10 million for the St. Thomas-St. John District and the St. Croix District; totally \$20 million. However, because of the financial state of the Territory, the Danish Government has agreed to donate \$20 million with a contribution of \$150,000 from the U.S. Virgin Islands,” Mr. Jackson said. “It is a pleasure to have stakeholders at the symposium to discuss how we can expand our cultural tourism product.”

Nadine Marchena-Kean, director of the Enterprise Zone, shared the details of transforming the J. Antonio Jarvis School into a cultural museum. “The concept of the living museum is that it will constantly be changing,” she said.

It will cover a timeline of 200-250 years of Virgin Islands history, and a portion will feature a permanent collection of antiques, paintings and photos. There will be an interactive component for children, and exhibits could rotate quarterly featuring the culture of the Virgin Islands. Leasing a space for a small café, bookshop, souvenir shop, and rental space for hosting community events such as book signings will sustain the daily operations of the museum financially, stakeholders agreed.

Ulla Lunn, architect at the Association of Historical Houses in Denmark (BYFO), stated that to establish a “Friends of the Museum” with different levels of donations, grants, and to have various prices for family passes, tourists and local visitors will also generate funds. Lunn added that hiring two staff members to oversee the museum that is 10,000 sq.ft. and will minimize operational costs.

In addition to financial sustainability, other topics included developing cultural educational initiatives, mentorship programs, a museum app, community center, comprehensive media package, hiring grant writers,

youth heritage presentations, and the possibility of the Virgin Islands Cultural Heritage Institute administering the programs.

The proposed architectural design of the Jose Antonio Jarvis Elementary School and Complex includes fine arts on the second floor, music and dance will be on the main floor, and administrative office and storage are on the lower level. The proposed outside features a historic ruin park, courtyard, shaded amphitheater space, My Brother's Workshop and a garden.

Centennial Legacy Project stakeholders include the Virgin Islands Transfer Centennial Commission, Government of the Virgin Islands and Denmark, Association of Historical Houses in Denmark (BYFO), The Royal Danish Academy, of Fine Arts, University of the Virgin Islands, Aarhus School of Architecture in Denmark, V.I. Department of Education, V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources, V.I. Department of Public Works, V.I. Department of Tourism, V.I Department of Property and Procurement, Economic Development Authority, My Brother's Workshop, the St. Thomas Historic Preservation Commission, Virgin Islands Council on the Arts, the Office of the Public Defender, and We From Upstreet, Inc. and the Office of the Senate President Myron Jackson, 32nd Legislature.

The "In Search of Identity" symposium will continue at Balter's Restaurant in Christiansted, St. Croix, on Tuesday, December 5th 10 a.m. to 3 pm; Wednesday, December 6th, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.; and Thursday, December 7th, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. St. Croix Legacy Project Director Gerville Larsen and architect Felicia Farrante will also present.