
71st Emancipation Festival Celebration Off to a Bright Start

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The Virgin Islands' 71st Emancipation Festival Celebration commenced with its traditional Torchlight Procession, marking the official start of the annual festivities.

The Elmore Stouff High School Drum Corps led the procession to the Waterfront Drive followed by the parade of royalties, a motorcade, Zion Sounds Fungi Band and a parade of lights carried by non-profit groups and other participants dressed in all white.

The spirit of emancipation and the joy of freedom were expressed through the glow of torches and the rhythms of the band and drums, as the procession made its way through the streets of Road Town and into the Charles Neil Frett Festival Village for the official opening of this year's Emancipation Celebration.

Mistress of Ceremony and Junior Minister of Culture and Tourism, Honourable Luce Hodge-Smith, expressed satisfaction with the turnout of the Torchlight Procession at the opening ceremony and said that she looked forward for its continued success. The ceremony also featured performances by young cultural dancers, followed by a moment of silence in honour of the late cultural icon and former legislator, Ms. Eileen Parsons OBE.

Premier and Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development, Honourable Dr. Natalio Wheatley, in his remarks recognised the late Eileen Lucia Parsons whom he said had a part of the Territory's festival celebrations for many years.

Premier Wheatley said, "When I was in primary school, we participated in the parade, and I did so because of people like Eileen Parsons—our first Cultural Officer—who played an instrumental role in the Festival Committee and led it for many years."

The Premier reminded the crowd gathered at the festival grounds about the true meaning behind the Emancipation Festival.

He said, "I want us to remember the reason for this season. It's not just about coming out to dance, drink, and have a good time. The reason for this season is

because our ancestors—our fore parents—who were enslaved on this soil, celebrated their freedom on August 1st, 1834. And if you are from the East, where I am from, we celebrated our emancipation in 1776, around June 30th.

The Premier added, “While we are free, we must celebrate our freedom responsibly. That means during this season, we must steer clear of bad behaviour. For those who have fallen into that form of slavery called crime, we must work to emancipate ourselves—from crime, from ill feelings toward our neighbours—and instead, celebrate love.”

Following remarks from Fifth District Representative and Minister for Communications and Works, Honourable Kye Rymer, as well as Chairperson of the Festival and Fairs Committee, Mrs. Natalie Penn-Lake, the ceremony continued with a presentation to this year’s honouree, Mr. Charles Neil Frett.

The event also included the acknowledgment of the Festival Royalties and this year’s Parade Marshal, Mrs. Kenisha Sprauve. The ceremony concluded with the cutting of the ribbon, signifying the official opening of the Emancipation festivities.

The Government of the Virgin Islands remains committed to preserving and protecting the Territory’s national heritage, culture, and cultural expressions.