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## Xpress Band Honored for Nearly Four Decades of Cultural Impact as Festival Village Opens on St. Croix

The Crucian Christmas Festival's opening night celebrated Xpress Band and quelbe icon Austin "Edgy" Christian Jr. for preserving Virgin Islands culture, before safety concerns forced police to shut down festivities mid-performance.

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**Officials and honorees at the opening of Festival Village.**

Each year, the formal opening of Festival Village is an opportunity to honor the guardians and champions of St. Croix's cultural legacy. On Monday evening, it was the turn of Xpress Band to be recognized for their almost four decades of contributions to their community, and to the unique sound of the Virgin Islands. "Express Band carried the sound of St. Croix and the Virgin Islands

across the globe,” said tourism commissioner nominee Jenifer Matarangas-King in her opening remarks. The band's wide reach is “affirming that our music belongs on every single stage and in every conversation about Caribbean cultural achievement.”

Founding members Al Baptiste Sr. (deceased), Patrick Edwards, Dean Baptiste, Toby Derima, and Pat Ragguett were reportedly encouraged by Third World drummer William Stewart to form their own ensemble. At the time, members were playing backup for the Mighty Sparrow. In Jamaica on tour, they met with Stewart who told them it was time to break out, and took them to Blue Mountain Studios, where they recorded their first album. After officially establishing themselves in 1987 in Brooklyn, New York, the band's presence in the community after relocating to St. Croix has been undeniable. With 32 albums under their belt, along with a string of singles, the band has received multiple awards for their music. Despite their success, “you guys are not too big to continue to be with us here, back at home,” said Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, during her remarks.

Along with Xpress Band, other Crucian cultural heroes were selected for recognition. The late Austin Eldred Christian Jr., or “Edgy”, was “a man whose voice, creativity, and devotion to quelbe has safeguarded the very soul of Virgin Islands culture,” said Ms. Matarangas-King, tearing up as she delivered those words. The cultural night honoree was a member of Stanley Jacobs and the Ten Sleepless Knights, a cultural institution that “not only played music, but preserved it,” according to Shaniqua Robinson of the Department of Tourism, host for the evening. Mr. Christian was the one who gave the band the name it carries to this day, allegedly borne of his quick wit and insight under pressure. “He epitomizes what it means to be a Virgin Islander,” Governor Albert Bryan Jr. declared.

Following the governor's remarks and closing benediction, the ribbon was cut to signify the official opening of the Express Famous Sound Stadium for the season. Unfortunately, the night's festivities were cut short in the middle of the performance from Trinidadian soca artist Voice.

The V.I. Police Department [brought a premature end to Monday night's proceedings](#) after a series of fights broke out, sparking safety concerns. Multiple scheduled performances were canceled, including that of homegrown soca artist Pumpa, and Small Axe out of St. Kitts. Pumpa later took to the stage briefly to inform patrons that, following discussions with the V.I. Department of Tourism, he is now scheduled to perform tonight at 11 p.m.