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St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

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## Jewish Service, Muslim Speaker, Christian Honorees -- A Tribute to the Legacy of Martin Luther King

by Barbara Birt

Jan. 18, 2008 -- Rabbi Arthur F. Starr began the annual Martin Luther King Day service at the Jewish Synagogue Friday night by calling on everyone to join in singing "Kumbaya" -- a song that popular culture relegates to the likes of a summer-camp bonfire.



From left: Aclesia Scotland, Odari Thomas, Megan McGrath, Sabina Constantin, Ella Elizee, Mohammad H. Mustafa, Rabbi Starr and Imam Hendi.

But amid the soft lights of the synagogue, with its shutters open, the breeze gently circulating above the padding of the sand floor, the singing resonated sincerity and grace. And so began a ceremony featuring a Sabbath service, a Muslim keynote speaker and tributes to six local students -- three from Christian schools -- honored for their intelligence and their commitment to community, during a tribute to the slain civil rights leader's legacy.

After delivering the Sabbath service, Starr began the tribute to the students by asking all teachers, counselors and school administrators to stand for recognition.

"We thank you for what you do, day after day, week after week, with little pay," the rabbi told them. "You have the most precious things in your possession -- six, seven hours a day ... and you make them into wonderful productive citizens.

"The highest honor that Judaism pays anyone is to be able to call someone 'my teacher.' So we honor you."

And then it was time to honor the students themselves: Sabina Constantin of All Saints School, Ella Elizee of Ivanna Eudora Kean High School, Megan McGrath of Antilles School, Mohammad H. Mustafa of Sts. Peter and Paul School, Aclesia Scotland of Seventh-day Adventist School and Odari Thomas of Charlotte Amalie High School.

Each student received a \$500 U.S. Savings Bond, as well as a copy

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of the book *Shared Dreams: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Jewish Community* by Rabbi Marc Schneier.

Before a resume was read listing each student's accomplishments -- academic, athletic and community service -- the rabbi summed up how outstanding a group of seniors these were by issuing an apology.

"I do apologize -- I received the resumes that guidance counselors and teachers sent to me on these students, and I challenge any one of you to take what any one of these students has done and put it on a single page!" he said.

Again and again, the words "high honor roll" were repeated, as were lists of community-service activities, special interests and exceptional talents.

"Get engaged and participate in public life as our students have done," said the keynote speaker after the students were introduced. "They are doing what needs to be done to create a future full of peace for all of us. We need to invest in them."

Imam Yahya Hendi, who serves as the Muslim chaplain at Georgetown University, delivered the keynote, not only as a special guest of The Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas, but also as a special friend of Rabbi Starr. The two met four years ago during a seminar that drew leaders from different faiths together for days of sharing food, prayer and traditions.

"I've know him for four years, but we've been brothers for over 4,000 years," Starr told the audience as he welcomed Hendi to the podium.

Hendi has written numerous publications and is a sought-after speaker on issues of interfaith relations, and no place exemplified interfaith quite as dramatically as did the Synagogue Friday night. One student in particular, Mohammad Mustafa, stood out. As a student of Sts. Peter and Paul, he has studied Catholicism since seventh grade, yet remained steadfast in his Muslim faith.

"I think this is wonderful," Starr told the audience, with levity in his voice. "At a Catholic school, a Muslim receives an award from a synagogue."

Hendi echoed Dr. King, proclaiming, "I believe, the dream of Martin Luther King lives on ... because we have a synagogue like this, and because we have schools likes these and because we have young women and men who are these.

"My brothers and sisters," Hendi continued, "the dream lives on. There are people out there who say we cannot make it happen .... We are tonight telling them that they are wrong. We are making history. This is history."

The evening closed with audience members joining hands and singing the civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome."

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## Black History Spotlight: Earle B. Ottley

In observance of February as Black History Month, the Source is highlighting Virgin Islanders who've made outstanding accomplishments in various fields. Today we spotlight a longtime legislator, affordable-housing pioneer and namesake for the Legislature building on St. Thomas, Earle B. Ottley.

[Click here for More...](#) 2008-02-21 05:21:07



## Judge Denies Motions to Dismiss Charges Against Plaskett and Biggs

Motions to dismiss the charges against former commissioners Dean Plaskett and Marc Biggs based on a lack of corroborated evidence were shot down Wednesday by presiding District Court Judge Curtis Gomez.

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## Attorney General: Jails Need Immediate Fix to Avoid Serious Consequences

V.I. jails need to have facilities for the mentally ill in the next four months or face sanctions, contempt of court and possibly federal takeover, Attorney General Vincent Frazer told the Rules and Judiciary Committee Wednesday.

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## Port Authority Board Cuts Budget as Economy Sours

The V.I. Port Authority board discussed Wednesday reducing its budget in the face of the national economic slowdown, with a total of \$3.1 million in cuts drawn primarily from capital projects.

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## Brief: Enid M. Baa Library Wins National Award

The Enid M. Baa Public Library is one of three winners nationwide in the second annual Bookapalooza program, selected by the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the American Library Association (ALA).

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## Governor Will Present Hamilton Awards Tuesday During V.I. Day in Washington

The governor will present Alexander Hamilton Awards to two U.S. senators Tuesday, which the Washington, D.C., city council has proclaimed Virgin Islands Day in the nation's capital.

[Click here for More...](#) 2008-02-21 04:47:29

## Senate Rules Committee Approves Nibbs for Top GERS Job

Rules and Judiciary on Wednesday gave a favorable recommendation to Austin L. Nibbs' nomination as administrator of the V.I. Government Employees' Retirement System, sending it out of committee to the full Senate.

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## Elementary School Gets Equipment Gift to Help Kids Get Fit

In memory of her son Nigel O. Hodge, St. Thomas resident Josephine Hodge has adopted the Health and Fitness Program at Lockhart Elementary School and made a donation Tuesday of more than \$1,000 worth of exercise equipment to help the students stay physically fit.



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## Refusal to Pay Kickback Cost Company Government Contracts, Witness Testifies

After refusing to pay a third kickback on a \$300,000 contract approved by former commissioners Dean Plaskett and Marc Biggs, PubSafe Engineering Consultants was pulled out of the running for other V.I. government contracts, company President David Tucker testified in District Court Tuesday.

[Click here for More...](#) 2008-02-20 02:15:29

## Residents to Constitutional Delegates: We Want Strong Municipal Government

Several St. Croix residents spoke Tuesday evening for strong, autonomous municipal government when the Fifth Constitutional Convention of the Virgin Islands' Committee on Government sought community input on what a V.I. constitution should say about local authority.



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## Luis Hospital CEO Fired Over Financial Concerns

Gregory Calliste was fired as the chief executive officer (CEO) of Gov. Juan F. Luis Hospital Monday because of mounting debt, officials said Tuesday.



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## Scholarships Available for Dependents of GERS Members

High school seniors who are dependents of Government Employees' Retirement System members are eligible to apply for a GERS scholarship.

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## V.I. Democratic Delegate Count Actually Counts for a Change

At the upcoming DNC, how the Virgin Islands votes will be of national significance. As Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama seek the nomination in a virtual dead heat among delegates, the Virgin Islands is experiencing its own deadlock.

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## Doucana with Cassava? Culinary Horizons Expand as Ag Fair Concludes

A sea of cars filled the field across from the Agriculture Department fairground Monday as much of St. Croix and hundreds more from St. Thomas and the wider Caribbean came out in droves for the third and final day of this year's Virgin Islands Agriculture and Food Fair.



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## Fishermen Reluctantly Agree to Try New Vented Pots

The St. Thomas Fishermen's Association is partnering with the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council (CFM) in a study to determine the number, if any, of compressed or juvenile fish that get trapped in fish pots.



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## Presidents Day Fills Tourism Coffers

Across the territory, hotels are booked for the Presidents Day weekend.

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## Sunday Rain Fails to Deter Crowds at Ag Fair

Sunday is seen by many as the big day of the big fair -- St. Croix's Agricultural and Food Fair -- and while morning rains reaching into the early afternoon threatened to dampen the festivities, it was just a threat.



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## @Work: Zora Sandals

Chances are if you've lived on St. Thomas for a while, you own a pair of Zora's sandals. The sturdy shoes are as emblematic to St. Thomas as the hook bracelets are to St. Croix.



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## V.I. Obama Backers Mix With Barack's New England Fans

What do chilly Massachusetts and the balmy Virgin Islands have in common? Women from both locales now have joined forces behind Sen. Barack Obama, launching the Massachusetts-U.S. Virgin Islands Women for Obama committee, whose kickoff event Sunday rallied some 75 to 100 people.



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## Antiques and Knickknacks Draw Crowd to Synagogue Auction

Raindrops Sunday did nothing to deter the throngs of art lovers, bargain hunters and ordinary folk out for an unusual time as they poured into the University of the Virgin Islands' Sports and Fitness Center for the Ninth Annual Synagogue Auction.



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