

ACT NO. 8 8 5 8

BILL NO. 35-0239

THIRTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Regular Session

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, after Claire graduated from high school, she held several administrative positions, to include - secretary at the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and receptionist at Foot Flair Shoes, located on the 69th floor of the Empire State Building in New York City, New York;

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

WHEREAS, Claire met Christian "Wally" Waldermar Roker at the Bernice Johnson Dance School in New York City;

WHEREAS, Claire married Wally Roker in November 1958;

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, in 1975, Claire was employed as a Travel Agent for Farrelly's Travel Agency, St. Croix;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, in the 1970's, Mrs. Roker developed an interest in the politics of the territory;

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

WHEREAS, in 1982, Mrs. Roker was a campaign volunteer with the Derek Hodge campaign for Governor against Juan F. Luis; and in 1984; she was a campaign volunteer for Hodge's campaign for the Legislature of the Virgin Islands; and in 1986, she was a campaign volunteer for Alexander Farrelly and Derek Hodge's campaign for Governor and Lieutenant Governor;

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

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

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

WHEREAS, Mrs. Roker is recognized as the "Virgin Islands Queen Mother of Pageants";

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

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

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

WHEREAS, in 1999, Claire successfully brought the Hal Jackson's Talented Teen International Competition to the Reichhold Center for the Arts on St. Thomas, after having brought the international pageant to St. Croix's Island Center in the late seventies;

WHEREAS, these scholarship competitions and pageants brought contestants, coaches, families, entertainers and production crews from the United States mainland, Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean to the Virgin Islands;

WHEREAS, the local pageants became known for bringing well known television and stage entertainers to St Croix, including El DeBarge, Johnny Gill, Ralph Carter, Michelle Thomas, Sheryl Lee Ralph, New Edition, Patrice Rushen, and many others;

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

WHEREAS, Mrs. Roker sent contestants and actively participated in the Smith Haynes Talent Competition in St. Kitts for 27 years, bringing home seven regional crowns;

WHEREAS, local contestants later went on to win or place in the top ten in competitions which included Miss Virgin Islands, Ms. Earth US Virgin Islands, Miss US Paradise Supranational, among others;

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, from 1973-74, Mrs. Roker was the social life columnist for the St. Croix Herald Tribute for which Mario DeChabert, Esquire, was the owner and editor and one of the originators and she served as the coordinator for the Frederiksted Economic Development Association’s Sunset Jazz series of outdoor concerts; and

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

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:

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

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

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

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

Thus passed by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands on July 22, 2024.

Witness our Hands and Seal of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands this 29th day of July, A.D., 2024.



Novelle E. Francis, Jr.
Novelle E. Francis, Jr.
President

Carla L. Joseph
Carla L. Joseph
Secretary



Bill No. 35- 0239 is hereby approved.

**Witness my hand and the Seal of the Government of
the United States Virgin Islands at Charlotte Amalie,
St. Thomas, This 9th day of August, 2024 A.D.**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Albert Bryan Jr.", written in a cursive style.

**Albert Bryan Jr.
Governor**