

DeJongh stresses value of investing in early childhood education at EDC summit

By JOY BLACKBURN
Daily News Staff

ST. CROIX — Gov. John deJongh Jr. stressed the importance of investing in early childhood education as he gave the keynote address at a conference Tuesday for Economic Development Commission beneficiaries.

In a speech that touched on a wide range of topics, deJongh ultimately zeroed in on the importance of quality education — and particularly early childhood programs — as a long-term investment in the territory's future and in its workforce development.

He spoke about change and about the economy and about the challenges the territory — and the EDC program — have experienced in recent years.

The Economic Development Commission Beneficiary Summit took place at the Divi Carina Bay Resort, and it moves to St. Thomas on Thursday at the Marriott's Frenchman's Reef Beach Resort.

The governor spoke of the average levels of higher education among Virgin Islands residents and noted that the percentage of V.I. residents with bachelor's degrees is lower than the average level in the United States.

Enrollment at the University of the Virgin Islands also has dropped in recent years, he said.

The governor also pointed to a high rate of poverty in the territory and noted that 35 percent of children younger than 5 in the territory live in poverty.

"We can do more, and we have to do more," he said.

The governor discussed the average amount spent per pupil — between \$10,000 and \$15,000 — for Head Start, Early Head Start and for K-12 education.

He then noted that the average cost to keep an inmate in the Bureau of Corrections is \$40,000.

That, he said, is a clear indication that "we have to do more in terms of where we are going and what we are doing."

Children up to age 4 are "like a sponge" in learning and absorbing what is around them, he said.

"Whatever you give them, they will give right back to you," deJongh said.

He then outlined efforts and initiatives in the territory to improve the quality of early childhood programs and education, including the work this month to implement a quality assurance initiative for early childhood programs in the territory. He said the territory is the first off-shore U.S. jurisdiction to begin such a program.

As he closed, he urged those involved with the EDC program to remember, as they make investments in the territory, the importance of education.

The summit was titled "Maintaining Ideal Conditions for Growth," and featured presentations on "Economic Resurgence in Difficult Times," "Making the Compliance Process Business Friendly," "Tax Reporting Requirements" and "Workforce Development."



Daily News Photo by JOY BLACKBURN
Gov. John deJongh Jr. gives the keynote address at a conference for Economic Development Commission beneficiaries Tuesday on St. Croix.

The conference presented an opportunity for EDC beneficiaries and government agencies to talk about how the EDC program can best be used toward the resurgence of the territory's economy, said Stephanie Berry, the EDC director of compliance.

— Contact Joy Blackburn at 714-9145 or email jblackburn@dailynews.vi.

Cruise Ships

Today, August 14

Disney Fantasy (4,000)	6:45 a.m. to 4:15 p.m.	Havensight
Freedom of the Seas (3,600)	noon to 7 p.m.	Havensight
Carnival Dream (3,646)	7 a.m. to 3 p.m.	Havensight

Thursday-Sunday, August 15-18

No ships

Monday, August 19

Carnival Valor (2,974)	7 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Havensight
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Tuesday, August 20

Carnival Liberty (2,974)	10 a.m. to 6 p.m.	Havensight
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Wednesday, August 21

Allure of the Seas (5,400)	9 a.m. to 6 p.m.	Crown Bay
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Thursday, August 22

Carnival Breeze (3,690)	7 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Havensight
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Numbers in parentheses indicate passenger capacity.



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