

# Economic Enterprise Zone spotlights pampering products



Nadine Marchena, director of the Economic Enterprise Zone under the Economic Development Authority, says by the time the products of local manufacturers appear on shelves in one of its pop-up shops, the businesses have evolved past the start-up stage.

Judi Shinnel

JUDI SHINNEL

**ST. THOMAS** — On a bustling Tuesday morning along Main Street, browsers follow shopkeepers into a corner store near Rothschild-Francis "Market" Square.

It's Spa Week at the Economic Enterprise Zone's pop-up shop, a time to showcase local makers of soaps, lotions, aromatherapy candles, scrubs and hair care products.

Skype producers were chosen to display their wares at Spa Week, according to Nadine Marchena, director of the EEZ, which falls under the Economic Development Authority. Each day, from Monday to Saturday, one of the six manufacturers sets up a demonstration to offer customers a treat.

"The idea of Spa Week is to engage in buying something local that you can bring into your home and have a specialty experience," Marchena said.

**PRODUCTS, PAGE 2**

## U.S. to help VI, P.R. residents who lost jobs after storms

**DANICA COTO**  
Associated Press

**SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP)** — Puerto Ricans and Virgin Islanders who lost their jobs after hurricanes Maria and Irma can start applying for disaster unemployment assistance after the U.S. doubled the 26 weeks of benefits, officials announced Wednesday.

The National Employment Law Project estimates that more

10,000 Puerto Ricans are eligible and that hump-sum payments could total nearly \$30 million, with overall individual payments ranging from \$2,000 to \$3,000.

But legal advocates worry the conditions set by Puerto Rico's government will make it hard for many to apply, including that workers have to provide the required documents in person and that internet options are not available.

Advocates are trying to reach

out to families that qualify, but worry they won't reach many given that more than an estimated 130,000 people fled Puerto Rico after the two major hurricanes hit the Caribbean in September 2017.

Natasha Lucia Ora Bannan, with the civil rights organization LatinoJustice FLDER, said in a phone interview that the extension is a recognition by the federal government that people affected by the hurricanes still

need help.

"Many remain unemployed and are suffering the impact of not having any income," she said. "We have to continue to look for ways to help them."

Payments will be issued retroactively to cover weeks affected by the disasters for those who qualify.

The benefits extension also applies to those from the U.S. Virgin Islands who remain jobless. Hurricane Irma passed near

St. John and St. Thomas on Sept. 6, 2017 as a Category 5 storm. Two weeks later, Maria passed south of St. Croix and then hit Puerto Rico as a Category 4 storm, causing more than an estimated \$100 billion in damage.

The extension of another 26 weeks of benefits surpasses the additional 13 weeks offered to those affected by Hurricane Katrina and the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

# PRODUCTS:

FROM PAGE 1

Tuesday's turn went to Linda Bailey, proprietor of Soul Creations Hair Salon and producer of Harmony Bath and Body Products. Wide-bottomed jars with colorful contents and white tops rest near a beaker of water and a towel. To experience the benefits of an exfoliating scrub, Bailey invites patrons to enjoy a hand massage.

The products were first developed for use in the salon 21 years ago, she said. Six years later, Harmony emerged as a sale item and a revenue enhancer.

Since then, the enterprise expanded to include a manicure-turing staff using locally grown ingredients like lemongrass, mint, aloe, sage and mango. Marketing the spa products has also given Bailey an opportunity to travel.

Another local manufacturer on the road in 2019 is Aquanette Chimney with her line, JDMatilda's Creations. At the pop-up store on Main Street, baskets of handmade soap are on display. When Chimney takes her display to the NY Now Winter 2019 Market in February, wholesalers will get a

glimpse of her full line including soaps, bath and body products, hair products, wax melts and candles.

An attorney by profession, Chimney used her background in Chemistry from the then-College of the Virgin Islands to create small batch of personal care products she sells at local craft fairs, a hotel gift shop and boutiques.

Personal care products represent one segment of local manufacturing supported by EEZ. The idea of marketing them and other goods made in the Virgin Islands

using a pop-up store arose in December, with help from a local commercial property owner and the Virgin Islands Council on the Arts.

Earlier this month, the venue featured the works of local authors. Artists and batik designers' works hang on walls, and in cases placed around the space. And, in a mix of art and spa products, local shoppers swooped up shower curtains decorated with life-sized quadriga dancers.

St. Croix artisans are also featured during Spa Week: Cultured Naturals, a line manufactured

on The Big Island, will set up a demonstration table and greet visitors on Saturday between 9 a.m. and noon.

Machena said participating manufacturers featured this week have already incorporated business practices endorsed by the Economic Development Authority through programs geared towards local small businesses.

The pop-up shop event is for EEZ businesses that have already established themselves and want to explore new marketing ideas or test the viability of opening a store of their own, Machena said.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 24, 2019