

# Crucian Heritage and Nature Tourism, Inc.

# 3B Strand Street

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Frederiksted, St. Croix, US Virgin Islands 00840

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## INVISIBLE HERITAGE: IDENTITY, MEMORY AND OUR TOWN PROJECT OVERVIEW

### CONTEXT

Invisible Heritage addresses the challenge of building human capital and strengthening our local economy by creating jobs and honing the skills of residents to restore historic structures in our town. Caught between the legacy of environmental devastation by Hurricane Hugo and the economic disaster wrought by the closing of a major industrial facility on island, Frederiksted has struggled to chart positive economic pathways for residents. Our project is an intervention crafted to meet our community's concrete needs for habitable buildings and viable employment through the restoration of six historic structures in Free Gut. In this way, we invigorate career pathways in the traditional building arts, preserving local artisanal building skills and engendering a sense of opportunity for our town's children, 55% of whom live in poverty.

### VISION

Upon completion of this ambitious project, historic properties will be occupied by low/moderate income residents along with artists and artisans, bringing life to formerly abandoned spaces. In building an accredited training and apprenticeship program for residents, a pipeline for careers in the building arts, historic restoration and preservation and the decorative arts will be established. With community ownership of the project, new processes for and works of socially engaged public art will be created. The power of the place will be charged by the historical narrative and will be activated by the community for positive transformation.

### GOALS

With our traditional building arts legacy as the foundation for success; we will use metalsmithing, woodworking, basketweaving and stonemasonry to train residents and restore six historic structures. Utilizing our folk performance arts (storytelling, traditional music and dance), we will both engage residents in dialogue and planning around the economic development of our town and integrate resident ideas into the use of the six rehabilitated buildings. We will employ community-centered approaches anchored in local dynamics to activate these once abandoned and neglected spaces.

*Specifically, Invisible Heritage aims to:*

- 1)** Establish certificated training in vernacular construction for high school students and adults – goal: prepare 75 students for careers in historic restoration and construction.
- 2)** Establish classes with Master Artisans - goal: provide training in historic restoration,

reinvigorate the art form and protect ancestral knowledge.

- 3)** Establish paid apprenticeship program for students with contractors hired to complete restorations of participating buildings in the target community – goal: create employment with living wages.

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**4)** Restore 6 historic properties and create live/work spaces for low income residents and artists- goal: energize cultural life, increase affordable housing.

**5)** Partner with local residents to support economic growth and exchange expertise collaboratively to spark the creative and professional growth of the local arts

community-goal: develop and promote mechanisms for informed civic engagement as opportunities for residents to empower themselves to identify and mobilize around community issues key to the program's sustainability.

**6)** Deploy public art as a catalyst for community engagement and rejuvenation

## PROJECT PARTNERS:

Virgin Islands Department of Public Works  
The University of the Virgin Islands- CCC  
Our Town Frederiksted  
Virgin Islands Department of Tourism  
St. Paul's Episcopal Church

The Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts  
The Frederiksted Health Clinic  
Clean Sweep Frederiksted  
The Frederiksted Community Garden  
The St. Croix Council of Elders

## COMMUNITY BACKGROUND:

Free Gut neighborhood was established during the Danish Colonial period (1753) by Free Blacks in the historic town of Frederiksted, St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands (also known as Freedom City by the town's 3, 000 year-round residents). Shaped by a complicated history and rooted in a tangible African-ness, Frederiksted grapples with a legacy of environmental and economic disaster. With a rate of family homelessness at 17% and a poverty rate currently around 25%, the need for a textured approach to community development is palpable. Residents have identified safe, affordable housing and economic opportunities as priority areas for change. CHANT and our partners are forwarding an asset-based program for community development that centers the cultural heritage of Freedom City in our neighborhood's revitalization.