



CRUCIAN HERITAGE AND NATURE TOURISM, INC.

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CHANT (CRUCIAN HERITAGE AND NATURE TOURISM, INC.)

INVISIBLE HERITAGE: IDENTITY MEMORY AND OUR TOWN PROJECT

AWARDED \$450,000 GRANT from ArtPlace America's 2016 National Creative Placemaking Fund

(December 6, 2016) CHANT (CRUCIAN HERITAGE AND NATURE TOURISM, INC.) was awarded \$450,000 from ArtPlace America National Creative Placemaking Fund in 2016 for its project, INVISIBLE HERITAGE: IDENTITY MEMORY AND OUR TOWN. ArtPlace America's Creative Placemaking Fund is a highly competitive national program that invests money in communities across the country in which artists, arts organizations, and arts and culture activity will help drive community development change.

According to CHANT Executive Director Frandelle Gerard, CHANT's project is one of 29 projects chosen, from almost 1400 applications, to receive funding. "We are so excited, not just for CHANT and our partners, but also for the town of Frederiksted which is home to the project. This is a workforce development project and will provide training and employment opportunities in traditional building arts for the young people of the town," said Gerard.

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 participate in the restoration of 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 job experience 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 the structures and will be activated by the community for positive transformation.



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GOALS

With our traditional building arts legacy serving as the foundation for the success of the project; metalsmithing, woodworking, basket weaving and stonemasonry are to be employed in the training of residents and actual restoration of the six historic structures. Utilizing our folk performance arts (storytelling, traditional music and dance, ritual theatre), this project will both engage residents in dialogue around the economic development of our town and integrate resident ideas into the planning and use of the six rehabilitated buildings and the implementation of the training and apprenticeship program. Community centered approaches anchored in the local dynamics will be utilized to activate these once abandoned and neglected spaces.

Specifically, Invisible Heritage aims to:

- 1) Establish certified vocational training in woodworking/joinery, stonemasonry, fiber, and metalsmithing for high school students and adults in partnership with CTEC – goal: prepare 75 students for the workforce armed with technical skills applicable to carpentry/construction.
- 2) Establish classes with various Master Artisans to augment training goal: provide training specific to historic restoration, reinvigorate the art form and safeguard ancestral knowledge.
- 3) Establish paid apprenticeship program for students with contractors hired to complete restorations of buildings purchased and/or leased in the target community – goal: create employment and offer living wages.
- 4) Restore 6 historic properties and create live work spaces for low income resident and artists in the community- goal: bring social, cultural life to the community, add to affordable housing stock, safeguard space for local residents.
- 5) Partner with local residents to enhance the quality of life for residents through supporting the economic growth of the neighborhood and exchanging knowledge, skills and expertise collaboratively to support the creative and professional growth of the local arts community-goal: develop and promote mechanisms and opportunities for informed civic engagement as opportunities for residents to empower themselves to identify and mobilize around community issues relevant to the sustaining of the program's successes.
- 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
Caribbean Community Center
Our Town Frederiksted
Virgin Islands Department of Tourism
The St. Croix Council of Elders

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
The Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts
The Frederiksted Health Clinic
Clean Sweep Frederiksted
The Frederiksted Community Garden



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COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

Free Gut is a neighborhood established during the Danish Colonial period (1753) for 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 palpable African-ness, Frederiksted is moving forward through 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 employment, safe affordable housing and economic opportunities as the priority areas for community intervention. Crucian Heritage and Nature Tourism and our partners are asset-based programs for community development that centers the cultural heritage of Freedom City in our community's revitalization.