

If you're a seasoned V.I. traveler, you likely know by now that each of the three main U.S. Virgin Islands has its own nickname. St. Croix is known as Twin City, an homage to the cities of Christiansted and Frederiksted that flank the island's east and west sides, respectively. St. Thomas, the most densely populated island that's home to the territory's highest point of elevation and the seat of the Virgin Islands government, earned the nickname Rock City. And St. John, where community ties are an important facet of life, is bestowed with the befitting title of Love City.



*Llewellyn Sewer working as a radio disc jockey at ZBVI in Road Town, Tortola*

# What's in a name?

By Andrea Milam



These island monikers show up in the names of businesses and nonprofits and in travel write-ups, and the St. Thomas musical duo R. City, best known for their song *Locked Away* featuring Adam Levine, named themselves in honor of their island home.

Though the terms Twin City, Rock City, and Love City have become a colloquial part of Virgin Islands

vernacular, not many people know how these nicknames came to be. The story belongs to a family that can trace its ties in the territory back for multiple generations.

Llewellyn Sewer, an ancestral native of the island of St. John, created the nicknames sometime in the 1970s during his tenure as a radio DJ. A multi-talented man with a vibrant personality, Llewellyn was better known as Big Lew. A Green Beret and Vietnam War veteran, Big Lew came home from the war to head up the Virgin Islands' Veterans Affairs office. He served as a delegate to one of the Virgin Islands Constitutional Conventions, and he worked as a producer under his own label, Trucker Man. As he shared his proposed nicknames for each of the Virgin Islands over the airwaves, his suggestions resonated with listeners, who easily adopted the idea of Twin City, Rock City, and Love City.

"After going through the war and coming home to realize what a wonderful place St. John is, it was easy for him to name his hometown Love City," says Anecia Sewer, who's married to Big Lew's son, also named Llewellyn Sewer. Together, the couple own and operate Love City Car Ferries, providing





a critical link between St. Thomas and St. John.

"Big Lew realized what wonderful people St. Johnians are," Anecia continues. "They welcome everyone and help everyone."

The Virgin Islands, and St. John in particular, has undergone significant and rapid changes since Big Lew bestowed each island with its own nickname. Though St. John remains a welcoming, idyllic vacation destination, tourism and development have experienced exponential growth over the past 50 years, making it harder for ancestral St. Johnians—including the Sewer family—to catch glimpses of the Love City that inspired the original moniker.

"The name Love City is used so widely, and it often feels very disconnected from its origins," says Big Lew's granddaughter, Hadiya Sewer. "I think my grandfather's vision for Love City was a form of love that was grounded in concepts of justice and Virgin Islands pride. For me, there's great excitement and pride for the role the Sewer family plays in the history of St. John, coupled with some sense of sadness in realizing that the type of love he envisioned for St. John seems to be dwindling."

Though the St. John of yesteryear is alive only in the imaginations of those who lived there during this special time, it's still possible to experience the true nature of Love City. Learn about and

show respect for the local customs and culture, strike up a conversation with an ancestral native of the island, seek out local foods from vendors who serve heaping plates of flavorful dishes with a warm smile. Read about bygone eras in books like *Before Our Time: An Oral History of St. John* by Janet Burton or *Vintage St. John* by Valerie Sims. Share the true origin story of the Virgin Islands nicknames with those who vacation here. Show your love for this place and

its people, and in return, you'll see why St. John could have no other nickname than the one it's been known by for decades—Love City.

