

by ANDREA MILAM



## Uncovering St. John

Shikima Jones-Sprauve embraces the island's history and culture.

A sugar mill ruin was Shikima Jones-Sprauve's playground when she was a child. She and her cousins would hunt in the bush for large, remarkable stones that once formed walls of 18th-century slave quarters, sucking on sweet, fragrant honeycomb from the thriving beehive at the top of the sugar mill. Today, the sugar mill and its associated plantation ruins are some of the only relics of that era that rest on private land, but the site is visited by thousands of tourists and residents alike, as Jones-Sprauve's family members have now opened it to the public.

"At first, nobody knew about the richness of the history at Susannaberg until we opened it up," she says. "Now, it's on the map as a must-visit destination on St. John. It's exciting for me to speak to the tourists there and tell them about the sugar mill that we own."

Jones-Sprauve is well known on



St. John for her effusive nature and her ability to connect with people from all walks of life. These skills have served her well in a 26-year career with the Virgin Islands government. From working as a youth coordinator under Gov. Roy L. Schneider to a post as office manager for the St. John administrator, Jones-Sprauve moved on to spend nearly 20 years working for the St. John Department of Sports, Parks & Recreation. In 2018, her career came full circle when she was appointed by Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. to serve as St. John administrator in the same office where she'd once worked as office manager.

She's a woman of action, taking a boots-on-the-ground approach to her position as the island's administrator. She can often be found on the job with various government agencies, tackling issues like potholes and abandoned cars. She's also a talented singer, performing at weddings and special events and even singing the Virgin Islands

March at government functions she attends as administrator.

Jones-Sprauve's childhood was split between St. Thomas, where her mom lived, and St. John, where she spent time with her father's family, an arrangement that fostered a deep appreciation for St. John from the time she was young.

"St. Thomas is more of a fast-paced island, while St. John is so laid back," she says. "Just getting on that ferry and seeing the ocean, the islands and the cays lets you know you're on your way to peace."

Present-day St. John is vastly different than the quiet, bucolic island that she grew up on, but for her and the many thousands of visitors who make the trip to St. John each year, this destination still possesses a special magnetism and tranquility. For those vacationing on St. John today, Jones-Sprauve's message is simple: "Embrace our culture," she says. "It's the most important thing for me."