



# Love City Livin'

## Kenny Chesney talks hurricane relief and finding an island home

By DACEY ORR SIVEWRIGHT  
Garden & Gun Magazine

In the world of country music, Kenny Chesney is larger than life. The East Tennessee native snagged his first big hit in 1997 with "She's Got It All," maintains a fiercely loyal fan base (dubbed "No Shoes Nation"), regularly headlines stadium shows, and recently set the Country Airplay Chart record with his thirtieth number-one single, "Get Along." Lately though, the singer, songwriter, and entertainer has added a new title to the list: humanitarian.

When Hurricane Irma began to pummel the Caribbean last September, Chesney grappled with the unknown as he waited for news about a community he'd come to cherish. Chesney had purchased a home in St. John in the early 2000s; the island welcomed him between recording sessions and gigs. So as the storm swept over the island, he channeled his fears into the studio in Nashville, where he wrote and recorded two songs: "Love for Love City" and "Song for the Saints."

"I wanted the people on the islands to know we were thinking of them, but also that we were going to be there for them," Chesney says. Before the full scope of the devastation was even determined, Chesney created the Love for Love City Foundation, a nonprofit that has since delivered food, water, medical supplies, children's textbooks, and more to help the U.S. and British Virgin Islands rebuild in the wake of



Irma and Maria, which followed less than two weeks later.

Today, Chesney continues to honor that mission with a new album, Songs for the Saints (which debuted Friday),

with 100 percent of its proceeds going to the foundation's continued hurricane-relief efforts. "It's going to take years to get the Saints close to where they were, to make the electric grid more modern, to rebuild so the people have a quality of life like before."

Garden & Gun ([www.gardenandgun.com](http://www.gardenandgun.com)) caught up with Chesney to talk about the new music, the work his foundation is doing, and why the islands will always have a special place in his heart. Read the interview below.

**Garden & Gun:** You've made a home on St. John, but you're from East Tennessee. What makes a place "home" for you?

**Chesney:** The people, really, and the pace. Where I come from, people know your name, and they're happy to see you. They ask how your family is, and if you're in trouble, they'll help you without thinking about what's in it for them. As I was coming into my own as an artist, really finding my voice, the folks in

See **CHESNEY**, page 22



Bailey Hill, Giffthill School alumnus Landis Wallace, and incoming senior Kade Wallace work on renovations to the school's lower campus playground.

## Giffthill School working to ready both campuses for Sept. 5 start date

By ANDREA MILAM  
St. John Correspondent

There's not a student to be found at Giffthill School, but that doesn't mean the private school's two campuses are quiet. Since school let out on June 14, contractors have been hard at work, tackling some of the hurricane damage they were unable to mitigate while school was in session.

The school opened Sept. 25, less than three weeks after Hurricane Irma ravaged the island. The school's upper campus, which is home to grades six through 12, was too badly damaged, so the entire student body, preschool through 12th grade, came together at the lower campus, which is where preschool through fifth grade classes are traditionally held.

Repairs were made at the upper cam-

pus over winter break, making it safe and ready for students, and the upper grades returned to that campus in January.

"Most of the repairs were put on hold because of school being in session," said Director of Communications Paula Smail.

Damages at the school that are being addressed this summer include the loss

See **GIFFTHILL**, page 21

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**GIFFT HILL**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

of gutters and the upper campus solar array, and loss of fencing around the upper campus athletic field and around the lower campus "green top," a wide, flat expanse where elementary children play.

New floors are being put into the lower campus great room and the preschool and pre-K rooms, to replace those warped by water during the storm; drainage issues are being addressed; and all classrooms are getting a fresh coat of paint. The upper campus kitchen equipment is being serviced or replaced, ceiling tiles are being cleaned and replaced, and leaky or broken windows and doors are being addressed. Not all repairs will be completed this summer, like the school's athletic field surface, which is damaged but still usable.

"The bill for repairs is coming in at \$1.5 million," said Smail. "A huge part of our fundraising is now dedicated to repairs. We got a lot of money from donors post-hurricane, but that went to tuition, because we waived tuition for all students. The priority at that point was to get kids back in school, and now we are working to get this campus back to what it was before."

The school's summer repairs will allow it to return to the level of programming reached prior to Irma. Having a functioning kitchen and a newly spruced-up garden at the upper campus will give students the opportunity to participate in farm to table activities, and the kitchen will be used to make snacks, served each day to the entire

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student body. A shade structure and fencing at the lower campus garden will keep students cool during Education and Resiliency Through Horticulture lessons, and will protect the herbs, fruits, and vegetables grown from the iguanas, chickens, and thrushies that have plagued them in the past.

"There's a huge feeling of hope that we can go back to a degree of 'new normal,' which is really great," said Smail.

Less visible to the public is the behind-the-scenes efforts being made for the school to build a long-term strategy for donations, on which GHS has already relied.

"We have an incredible community on island and off island supporting the school, which is really impressive," said Smail.

To learn more about the school, or to make a donation, visit [www.giffthillschool.org](http://www.giffthillschool.org).

**Love City happenings****New Tax Assessor hours**

Beginning this week, the cashier services at the St. John Office of the Tax Assessor, located at the Islandia building, will be open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

**St. John Passport Office**

Residents can apply for passports in person at the St. John Passport Acceptance Facility at the Islandia building on Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Only photos taken at Connections are currently being accepted at this location.

**Arts of the Ages at Annaberg**

Join local artists, bakers, musicians, and gardeners at the Annaberg ruins on Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., when these talented Virgin Islands residents will be on hand to demonstrate their traditional skills at the Arts of the Ages event hosted by the Virgin Islands National Park.



Laurel Brannick of the Virgin Islands National Park, standing, above left, oversees swimmers at Trunk Bay on Tuesday. The weekly swimming lesson is part of the Sports, Parks and Recreation summer camp, a five-week-long program that's taken St. John youth on sailing trips, seashore walks, hikes, and to Coral World. Several of the camp's activities have been paid for by the Friends of the V.I. National Park, which is also funding staff and lunches for campers during the camp's final week.

Volunteer Keleigh Rees helps Gabriela Paul swim at Trunk Bay on Tuesday, left.

Daily News photos by ANDREA MILAM

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