

LOCAL NEWS

VOPE 'Sweet 16, Legal 18' Girls and Women Empowerment Encounter set for Saturday

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ORGANIZERS OF VESSELS OF PURPOSE Elite (VOPE), a girls empowerment and mentoring program is set to host their Third Annual Girls and Women Empowerment Encounter at the Pelican Bay Resort, beginning at 3:00 p.m. on Saturday

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Unlike the non-profit organization's previous events, this year, founder and program director of VOPE, Brennae Rolle-Cooper, expressed that the event will be held in the form of a panel discussion, targeting a topic near and dear to her, that of the legal age of sexual consent within The Bahamas.

"On Saturday, April 29, beginning at 3:00 p.m. at the Pelican Bay Resort, we will be hosting our Third Annual Girls and Women Empowerment Encounter. This year, our theme is 'Sweet 16; legal 18', with a focus on the Sexual Offences Act, where we will be looking at the age of sexual consent in The Bahamas. We will have a panel discussion with a variety of professionals inclusive of attorneys, medial personnel, youth pastors, from the spiritual aspect, social workers concerned parents as well some of our youth, both male and female for the event.

Rolle-Cooper, a social worker by profession, stated that

addressing the age of sexual consent is one that needs to be amended as the repercussions of sexual activity with minors is far reaching; hence the decision to make present the issue as the core of this year's empowerment encounter.

"This is extremely important; personally it is and as I shared with the mentors of my organization, and other persons within the community, it is a concern

for many people, and, it has been for me personally for a number of years, being a social worker for the past 20 years. It is something that I believe the public needs to be sensitized and educated on it because many persons are not aware of what the present law is.

"VOPE was officially launched in September 2014. It is a girls' mentoring and empowerment program, where

we service girls who are residents of East End, or who have some type of affiliation, with East Grand Bahama. Our purpose is to expose our girls to an environment where they can grow spiritually, and emotionally, where they can be reminded that they are fearfully and wonderfully made. We are big on community service that is our platform. We encourage our girls to be leaders, empower

them to lead in their churches, in the community and in their schools."

Chairing the panel discussion on Saturday will be Ruth Cadet, Founder of Sparkles Mentoring Group and Rayette McDonald, Founder of Esteemed Productions. Panelists include attorney and VOPE mentor, Pleasant Bridgewater, Royal Bahamas Police force Officers (RBPF) Corporal Lamardo Bowe and Corporal Latoya Major-Rolle, social workers Fran Brice and Rochelle Minnis, Sister Cheryl Bain, Principal Nursing Officer at the Rand Memorial Hospital, Sister Cathy Saunders, also of the RMH.

"From a spiritual standpoint Pastors Kyle Maycock and Pastor Wayne Carey will be speaking, as well as what I call our social activist fighter, Joy Ritchie-Greene, she has been very instrumental when this law was being passed, she has a wealth of knowledge to share with us in that regard. We also have a youth, a young male, Raphael Roker, a student of St. Georges High, and an active youth member of Jubilee Cathedral. This young man is positive minded; he is going in the right direction and I truly feel that he will add a lot to this panel discussion. To top off the evening will be Pastor Valentine Johnson and Edamae Rolle-Jones, the mother of Jonquell

Jones. Both of them will be speaking on the value system; if the law is 16 or if the law changes to 18, it is your choice and how you value your body, and your self worth. We want them to make the right choice. Everyone will be leaving empowered.

Additionally, VOPE Mentor Lavonia Russell, shared that a number of the mentees within the organization will receive awards for academic and civic achievement on Saturday as well.

"Our awards will be based on the girls that are members of VOPE. Awards will be presented in academics, community service, and the elite vessels award. We also held an essay competition on the topic, 'The Sexual Offence Law and why should the age of sexual consent in The Bahamas be amended from 16 to 18 years old. The winners of the essay competition will be announced on Saturday, said Russell.

The event is open to all, however as it is the program's main fundraiser, Rolle-Cooper shared that there is a fee, which will include a lunch. Persons can contact her at 559-3600 or on Facebook at Vessels of Purpose Elite to secure seating. Persons will also be accommodated on the day of the event, however, she encourages persons to reserve seating prior to the event as seating is limited.

CHANCES GAMES IS NOT CLOSING ITS DOORS



DISPELLING RUMORS - Raymond R.H. Culmer (left), CEO of Jarol Investments Ltd. and Chances Games and his attorney, Carlson Shurland (right) dispelled recent rumors that Chances Games would be shutting down. (PHOTO: SHAYNE STUBBS)



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Culmer said that Chances employs over 400 persons, operates almost 80 locations and pay their substantial taxes and other obligations on time.

"Our suppliers and landlords are so much happier, because of our being in business," he maintained.

He added that resulting businesses that have been generated by Chances have also been very substantial.

Culmer questioned why Chances would be rumored to be shutting down, when allegedly there are illegal operators operating with impunity.

According to Culmer, gaming houses like Chances are seen as being very profitable when that is not always the case.

"We just had a casino closed and I'm sure taxes were not paid because it was not profitable," he claimed.

Culmer added that other industries in Grand Bahama make much more money than the gaming industry.

Culmer's attorney Carlson Shurland reiterated that Chances Games is not going anywhere.

"They've been here for 20 years and they will continue to give stellar services as part of their motto," he said.

Culmer maintained that the rumors, which were brought on by the current case had created panic amongst his staff; therefore, it was important to make a statement regarding the business's operational status.

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U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL LOOKS FORWARD TO 'CONTINUED SUCCESSFUL BILATERAL PARTNERSHIP' WITH THE BAHAMAS

Bahamian and United States officials engaged in a Bilateral Meeting early Wednesday morning ahead of the start of the final day of the 61st Regular Session of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) held April 24-26 at the General Services Building of the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (OAS). Pictured (from left) are: Rochelle Basden, Deputy Director, Psychological Services, Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre; Sergeant David Ramsey, Supply Reduction Officer, National Anti-Drug Secretariat, Ministry of National Security; Lowena West, Civil Society Bahamas; Luis Arreaga, U.S. State Department; Dr. Bridgette Rolle, Bahamas Head-of-Delegation; Teddi Shihadeh, U.S. State Department and Carla Johnson, Executive Officer, National Anti-Drug Secretariat, Ministry of National Security.

(BIS PHOTO: MATT MAURA)

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Should have good writing and communication skills; and able to problem solve and manage workload to ensure projects are delivered on a timely basis.

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