HR CONNECT NEWSLETTER

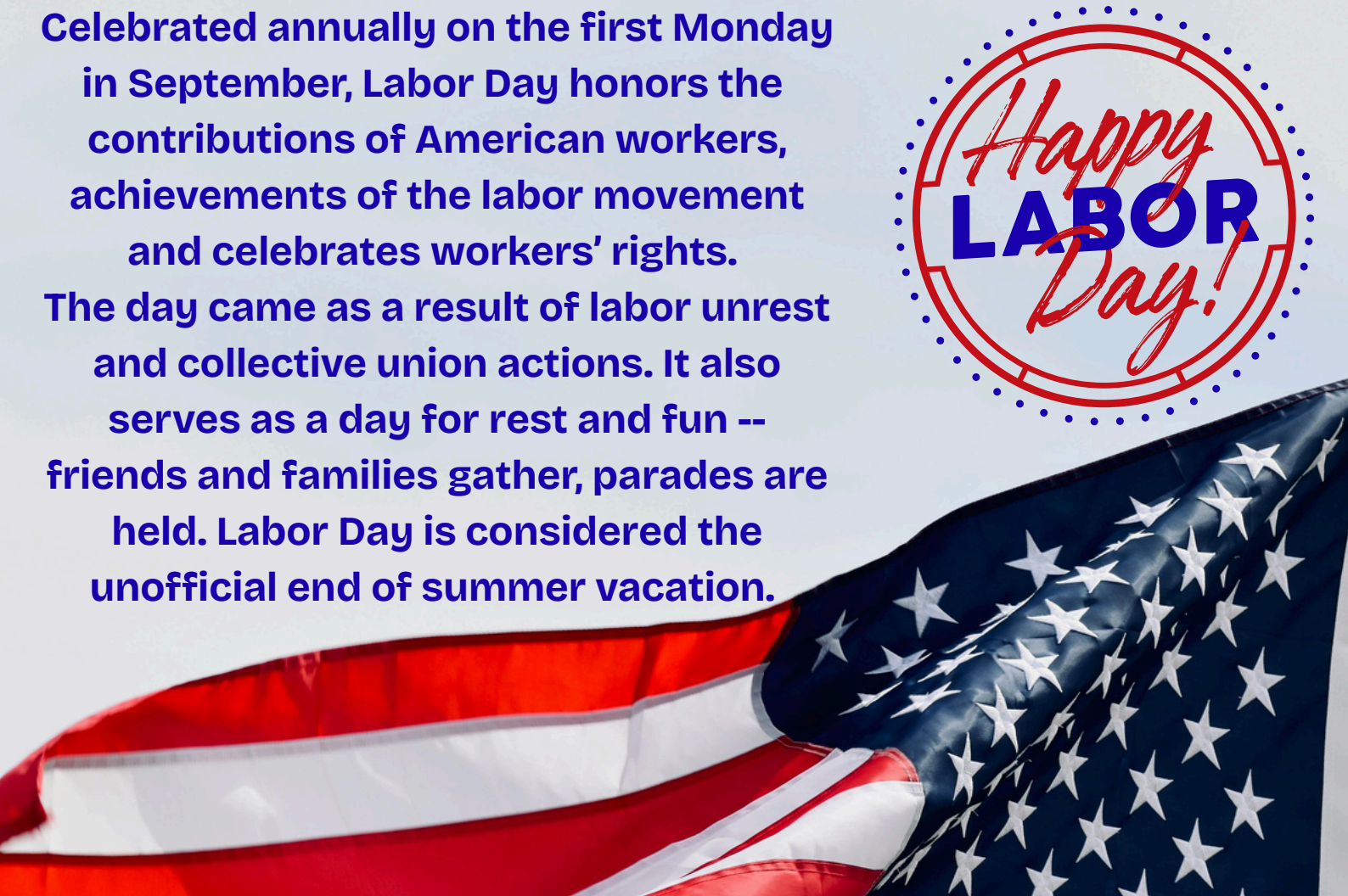
September 2025

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Celebrated annually on the first Monday in September, Labor Day honors the contributions of American workers, achievements of the labor movement and celebrates workers' rights.

The day came as a result of labor unrest and collective union actions. It also serves as a day for rest and fun -- friends and families gather, parades are held. Labor Day is considered the unofficial end of summer vacation.



SEPTEMBER IS...

National Sickle Cell Awareness Month

Sickle cell disease is the most common inherited blood disorder in the U.S. and affects over 100,000 Americans. The disease gets its name from the "sickle" shaped red blood cells that develop. These cells block blood flow and cause pain throughout the body.

Ways to Support Sickle Cell Warriors

Donate blood. Blood transfusions are one of the most critical treatments for sickle cell patients. They benefit most from transfusions given by people of their same race or similar ethnicity.

Give to organizations that support sickle cell research or assist with improving the quality of life for people living with sickle cell disease.

Learn more about sickle cell disease and join others in efforts to bring attention to it.

HEALTH AND LIFE INSURANCE REMINDERS:

Open Enrollment is ongoing and ends on Friday, September 12th!

Please be sure to review and update your life insurance and GERS beneficiaries if necessary.



Updating Beneficiaries

What is a beneficiary?

A beneficiary is someone you choose to receive a life insurance benefit or your GERS contributions payment should you pass away. There are 2 types, primary and contingent. Primary beneficiaries are the first to receive payments. contingent beneficiary would receive the payment if the primary beneficiary is deceased, incapacitated, or cannot be located.

Why should I update beneficiaries?

Reviewing and updating beneficiaries ensures an easy process for any benefits payout.

When should I update my beneficiary?

Life events such as marriage, divorce, birth of a child, or death of a loved one can impact your beneficiary designations. If your beneficiary's contact information changes please update also.

How do I update my beneficiary?

Beneficiaries are updated by visiting the Bentek and GERS' websites. Please visit www.mybentek.com/gvi AND www.usvigers.com/ Beneficiaries and contact information can be updated at any time.



THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Akela Richards
English Teacher
Juanita Gardine K-8 School
12 Years with the VIDE Family



What is a professional accomplishment you're particularly proud of?

As a teacher, I am particularly proud of helping students improve their confidence and understanding of challenging subjects. Seeing students succeed and develop a love for learning is very rewarding. I am also proud of creating engaging lessons that make complex topics easier to understand and inspire curiosity. Additionally, I take pride in building positive relationships with students and supporting their personal growth.

What do you enjoy most about being part of the VIDE Family?

I enjoy being part of the Virgin Islands Department of Education because of the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in students' lives and contribute to the community. I appreciate the collaborative environment with fellow educators who are dedicated to student success. It's fulfilling to work in a diverse and vibrant setting that encourages growth, innovation, and lifelong learning. Being part of this department allows me to serve my community while helping students reach their full potential.

What skills or expertise have you developed since being here?

Since being with the Virgin Islands Department of Education, I have developed valuable skills in leadership, communication, and educational administration, supported by my master's degree in Education Administration. I have also gained experience as an alternate union representative, which has enhanced my ability to advocate for teachers and students effectively. Additionally, I am honored to have been recognized as Teacher of the Year, which reflects my dedication, professionalism, and commitment to excellence in education.

Care to share a fun fact about yourself that many may not know?

I am a proud member of the Nascent Mindful Readers Book Club, where I enjoy exploring new stories and sharing insights with fellow book lovers. I absolutely love the beach and find it to be the perfect place to relax and unwind. I also have a passion for good food and enjoy trying new dishes whenever I get the chance. When I'm not reading or at the beach, I love meeting up with friends to share laughter, jokes, and memorable moments. These fun activities help keep me energized and bring joy to my life!

Happy Hispanic Heritage Month!





Hispanic Heritage Month is observed from September 15 to October 15.

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan expanded the former weekly celebration to the month-long one we have today. September 15th was chosen as it is the independence of several Latin American countries including Mexico, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. We join in celebrating Hispanic history and culture and appreciating the many contributions of Hispanic educators, artists, scientists, writers, healthcare professionals, entrepreneurs and government leaders.



THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Sharra Mae Domingo-Estigo
Special Education Teacher
Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School

3 Years with the VIDE Family



What motivates you?

My students are my greatest motivation. Even with the challenges they face, they continue to radiate resilience, joy, and determination. Every step they take, whether is winning a contest or mastering a new skill, inspires me to keep going. My family, especially my husband, is also a source of strength. Creating content for SPED Edvocate inspires me as well, allowing me to extend my voice beyond the classroom and encourage more people to understand, support, and celebrate learners of all abilities.

What do you enjoy most about being part of the VIDE Family?

What I enjoy most about being part of the VIDE Family is the strong sense of community and collaboration. I feel supported both as an educator and as an advocate for students with disabilities. I am inspired each day by the opportunity to work with dedicated colleagues who share the same vision of equity and inclusion. I also appreciate how VIDE celebrates diversity and culture, which allows me to bring my own background and experiences into the classroom while learning from others. Being part of VIDE has given me the platform to make a meaningful differences.

What is a professional accomplishment you're particularly proud of?

One of my proudest accomplishments is being recognized internationally with the Hall of Fame Excellence Award from SEAMEO SEN (2022) and the Emerging Special Educators of Color Leadership Award from CEC (2024). Beyond the awards, what makes me proud is that they reflect the advocacy and dedication I have for students with disabilities not just in the Virgin Islands, but globally. Through SPED Edvocate, I've also been able to reach audiences beyond my classroom, giving voice to the experiences of students and teachers in special education.

What inspired you to pursue this career field?

Growing up in poverty, I learned early on the value of resilience and perseverance. Education became my lifeline and the key to breaking cycles of hardship. My own journey of receiving a scholarship that allowed me to study further inspired me to give back through teaching. I chose special education because I believe every child, no matter their abilities, deserves opportunities to thrive and be seen for their potential. This passion also led me to create SPED Edvocate, a (Facebook page) platform where I share content to raise awareness, advocate for inclusion, and support both teachers and families of children with special needs.

Congratulations to the St. Thomas Education Warriors Team who won 2nd Place at Battle of the Agencies!



St. Croix, come out to Cramers Park on Saturday, September 6th to cheer on the St. Croix Education Warriors Team!



September is

Childhood Obesity Awareness Month

Childhood obesity is a critical public health challenge that affects one in five children in the United States. Obese children face an increased risk of later developing chronic health conditions, such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, sleep apnea, bone and joint problems. Obesity can also impact children's emotional and social well-being, resulting in bullying and lower self-esteem.

4 WAYS TO PROMOTE PREVENTION

Encourage them to be active for at least 1 hour every day. Walking, bike riding or playing a sport with friends are great options.



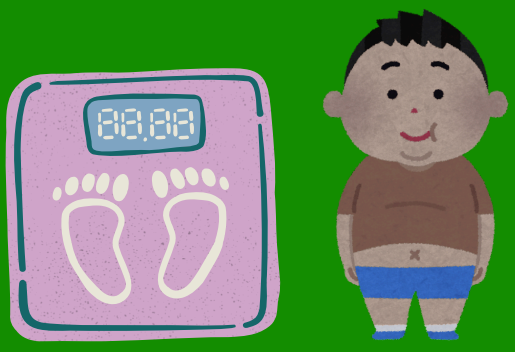
Prepare plenty of fruits, vegetables and healthy, high fiber snacks instead of processed snacks, junk foods and sugary drinks.



Ensure they are getting adequate sleep every night. Sleep regulates metabolism, and reduces hunger, which reduces risk for weight gain.



Talk to your child's doctor about any concerns you have about managing their weight



Question of the Month

What book are you currently reading?

Let us know and we'll feature it in the next HR Connect!

Click here:
https://forms.office.com/r/N67qyYV83N



Cauliflower Breadsticks

Makes about 10 breadsticks

Ingredients

- 1 large cauliflower, shredded
- 2 cups shredded cheese
- 1 large egg
- ¼ cup parsley
- ¼ cup basil
- 1 minced garlic clove
- 2 teaspoons salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- Marinara sauce



Directions

1. Preheat oven to 425˚. Process cauliflower in batches in a food processor until finely ground. Microwave, covered, about 8 minutes. When cauliflower is cool, wrap in a clean kitchen towel and squeeze dry.

2. In another bowl, mix half of the cheese into cauliflower; reserve remaining cheese. Combine other ingredients; stir into cauliflower.

3. On a baking sheet lined with parchment, shape cauliflower mixture into a rectangle. Bake until edges are golden brown, 20-25 minutes. Top with reserved cheese; bake until melted, for 10-12 minutes. Cut into breadsticks. If desired, enjoy with marinara sauce.