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Forum to target human rights issues in the Virgin Islands

By JOY BLACKBURN
Daily News Staff

Human rights in the territory will be the focus of a forum March 13 at St. Croix's Divi Carina Bay Resort.

"We want to build a cadre of community leaders," said Barbara Jackson-Lee, executive director of V.I. Perinatal, Inc., which is sponsoring the forum in collaboration with the V.I. Commission on the Status of Women.

"Human Rights in the Virgin Islands: Why Does it Matter?" grew out of V.I. Perinatal's Women of Color Living in the Virgin Islands Path to Health Justice initiative, which was fund-

ed by a Ford Foundation grant, Jackson-Lee said.

About 120 women got involved in that initiative, and it led to a desire to look at broader, systemic issues dealing with access to health care in the territory, Jackson-Lee said.

"We realized we needed to take a position that health care is really a human right," she said. The non-profit is launching a Community Action Initiative with a second grant from the Ford Foundation. The forum is part of that initiative.

The forum will feature a panel presentation exploring human rights and discussing why it matters in the territory. Speakers will delve into human rights and health

Family issues roundtable discussions

The first of two roundtable discussions focusing on families and family issues in the territory, titled "Creating a Blueprint for Survival," is set to begin at 10 a.m. today at Gertrude's Restaurant on St. Croix.

The roundtable will move to St. Thomas at the Palms Court Harbor View on March 10.

Family Court Judge Patricia Steele will give the keynote speech at today's roundtable. On St. Thomas, Dilsa Capdeville, Kidscope executive director, will do the keynote speech.

V.I. Perinatal and the USVI Commission on the Status of Women are sponsoring the roundtables. Registration at the door is \$20, which includes breakfast and lunch.

care, as well as human rights and the constitutional convention.

Byllye Avery, founder and president of the Avery Institute for

Social Change and the National Black Women's Health Project, will speak at the event.

As part of the initiative, V.I.

Perinatal also, in the future, will offer a series of leadership training sessions, called Spirit in Action: Circles of Change. Those who go through the training sessions will work as community activists to help shape the health care system and policies in the territory, Jackson-Lee said.

Those who are interested in the training will be able to sign up at the forum, she said.

The forum is set for 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on March 13 at the Divi. There is no fee to register, but seating is limited and those who want to attend need to reserve a spot, Jackson-Lee said.

To do so call **713-8083** or **713-1606**.