



‘Kids spell love t-i-m-e’

Guest speakers share their wisdom with VI educators at conference

SUSAN ELLIS

ST. CROIX-Dozens of education personnel stood in line for a hug from the keynote speaker yesterday and then hurried to workshops that continued the rest of the day at the St. Croix Educational Complex during a professional development conference hosted by the Virgin Islands Department of Education.

During the two-day conference, teachers, administrators, secretaries, monitors, nurses, counselors and other staff members listened to two prominent motivational speakers on modern education techniques and practices. They attended four workshops each day, choosing from more than 90 topics according to Janine Schuster, DOE deputy superintendent for operations.

The keynote speaker yesterday was Stephen Sroka, adjunct professor for the school of medicine at Case Western Reserve University and award winning educator. Sroka won the Walt Disney health teacher of the year in 1994 and was inducted in the National Teachers Hall of Fame in 1996. He said he is also proud of his appearance on the Oprah Winfrey show.

A high-energy speaker who ran up and down the aisles of the auditorium, Sroka led the audience in cheers and exercises during his presentation. His philosophy is “to teach the person not the point average, or grade.”

“Kids spell love t-i-m-e,” he advised.

Sroka said St. Croix has the same issues with children as are found in Hawaii and Trinidad where he recently lectured, and, in fact, around the world.

“I can feel it – you have a gang

problem,” he said. He also told the audience that today’s children are living in a toxic society, with pumped up egos, deflated souls, media nourished or “screenagers” and parents who are MIA (missing in action). Sroka said even though schools are struggling, currently they are the safest place for the children.

Keeping with his theme of dealing with children in education, Sroka talked about motivating and communicating with children.

“The greatest gift to give our children is hope,” Sroka quoted President Barak Obama. He demonstrated human value with a wadded up \$20 he threw on the floor and stomped on. He pointed out that both children and the bill retained their value.

Sroka also talked about the power each person has – The Power of One. He asked the audience if they would step in if they heard someone making fun of another student. Everyone agreed they would.

“Words kill or give life. They are poison or fruit. You choose,” he said. Sroka compared education to a chair with the four legs being the student, the school, the family and the community. If one leg is broken, the chair falls, he said.

Raised in a housing project in Cleveland, Sroka failed third grade and his report card was inscribed, “parents notified boy is retarded,”



Susan Ellis

even though he is actually dyslexic. He was beaten up so badly in ninth grade that both hips were broken and he was told he may never walk again. He overcame both disabilities and has traveled the world with his upbeat message.

Sroka’s final message to the educators was to “learn all you can, help each other, and tell the people you love that you love them.” He met with administrators for a workshop after his presentation.

The keynote speaker on Thursday was Pedro Noguero, professor in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development at New York University. Noguero was recently considered for the position of Obama’s Secretary of Education. His topic was “Closing the Achievement Gap in Schools.”

Noguero and Sroka met with parents and stakeholders on Thursday evening to discuss their innovative ideas and cutting-edge education philosophies and practices.

A similar two-day conference was held on St. Thomas at the same time with different speakers and workshops, Schuster said.