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## Red Lights, Lasting Hope: Rotary Clubs of St. Croix on Oct. 24 Join Global Efforts to Eradicate Polio

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**Fort Christianvaern Park on Oct. 24, 2018 for World Polio Day. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM**

On World Polio Day, October 24th, the Rotary Clubs of St. Croix will host an event aimed at advancing the cause of eradicating the debilitating disease. This initiative is in tandem with thousands of events planned by Rotary Clubs globally, highlighting the ongoing battle against polio.

The four Rotary Clubs of St. Croix, collaborating with the VI Fire Service and EMS, have orchestrated a series of events for the day to raise both funds and awareness. Their primary activity will be illuminating Fort Christiansvaern with the "End Polio Now" red color and

projecting the logo on its tower. Scheduled from 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., this spectacle will be live-streamed on the Rotary Club of St. Croix Harborside's Facebook page, according to a recently issued release. The brilliance of the display will intensify as the evening darkens.

To bolster the fundraising efforts, the VI Fire Service and EMS will host a Boot Drive during the illumination event.

The fight against polio has witnessed significant progress since the inception of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) in 1988. Spearheaded by Rotary and its partners, the initiative sought to tackle a staggering 350,000 annual polio cases spread across 125 countries. Their efforts have borne fruit: today, the incidence of polio has plummeted by 99.9%. Nevertheless, wild poliovirus cases still emerge in two countries - Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Rotary's commitment to eradicating polio remains steadfast. Its aim is to ensure every child is vaccinated against this preventable disease. But without adequate funding and political support, there's a genuine risk of polio returning to countries that are currently free from it. Annually, Rotary pledges to raise \$50 million to back global eradication endeavors. This commitment is matched 2-to-1 by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, thereby amplifying the yearly contribution to \$150 million.

Those interested in supporting this mission can donate to Rotary International's PolioPlus fund. Contributions made will be doubly matched by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation up to \$50 million. Direct donations can be made at [www.endpolio.org](http://www.endpolio.org).

Furthermore, even when polio is completely eradicated, the Rotary and its GPEI partners have pledged an annual \$450 million to ensure vaccines are available, preventing any resurgence of the disease.

Historically, the Rotary Clubs' involvement in polio eradication dates back to the 1960s with efforts in the Philippines. Rotary's official eradication program, PolioPlus, was established in the early 1980s. Despite challenges, such as not meeting Dr. Jonas Salk's challenge to eradicate polio by Rotary's 100th anniversary, the commitment has never waned. Since 1985, Rotary has invested over \$2.1 billion in the cause and has been instrumental in vaccinating over 3 billion children.