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VIFEMS Christens New Fireboat Honoring Retired Captain Antonio William Hendricks

The Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical Services has christened a new dual-purpose fireboat named in honor of retired Captain Antonio William Hendricks, recognizing his decades of service and contributions to marine-based emergency response.

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In a milestone event marking the continued modernization of emergency services in the territory, the V.I. Fire and Emergency Medical Services (VIFEMS) christened a new fireboat on Friday, April 4. The vessel not only represents an advancement in maritime emergency response capability but also stands as a tribute to retired Captain Antonio William Hendricks, a pioneer in Virgin Islands fire service.

The dual-purpose fireboat, which will be used for maritime firefighting and emergency medical transport, is expected to significantly boost the territory's ability to respond to incidents that conventional fire trucks and ambulances cannot reach. Its launch comes as a result of efforts initiated during the early days of the Bryan administration under the leadership of then-Director Daryl A. George Sr., who championed the acquisition to bolster VIFEMS' marine operations.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr., speaking at the christening ceremony, praised Captain Hendricks for his lifetime of service and leadership during some of the territory's most challenging emergencies. "It is with earnest dedication that I say thank you, Captain Hendricks," said the governor, recognizing the honoree's contributions and commitment to public safety. He noted Hendricks' involvement in high-profile incidents such as the 1979 Angelina Lauro cruise ship fire and the Carib Gas fire—events that underlined the need for marine-based firefighting capability.

A native of St. Thomas, Captain Hendricks began his service in 1965 as a volunteer firefighter before officially joining the department in 1971. He steadily rose through the ranks, eventually attaining the rank of Captain, and became known for his technical expertise and forward-thinking approach to emergency response. He was an early and vocal advocate for a fireboat, a need that has now been fulfilled in his name.

Beyond traditional firefighting, Hendricks established the department's first underwater rescue team, enhancing its capacity to conduct marine and submerged rescue operations. He further distinguished himself by earning certifications from institutions such as Texas A&M's Marine Fire Fighting and Emergency Training program and the National Fire Academy. Hendricks also held a U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Marine License, adding to his credentials as a maritime safety expert.

The christening of the fireboat not only honored Hendricks' legacy but also reaffirmed VIFEMS's mission to safeguard Virgin Islands residents and visitors through state-of-the-art equipment and specialized training. The fireboat will also enable quicker and safer transport of patients from St. John to St. Thomas, giving EMS responders greater flexibility in critical scenarios.