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RTPark Expands STEM Programs to Nearly Every Public School, Eyes Private Sector Growth

The V.I. Research and Technology Park's STEM program now reaches more than 350 students across the territory, with plans to expand into private schools. Two STEAM innovation centers are also in development, advancing youth access to technology and design.

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The RTPark facility located on the University of the Virgin Islands campus on St. Croix, serving as a hub for innovation, entrepreneurship, and technology development in the territory.

At its Tuesday meeting, the V.I. Research and Technology Park (RTPark) board received a detailed update from Executive Director Eric Sonnier on several key initiatives, highlighting

major progress in youth outreach, renewable energy, and local innovation efforts.

Mr. Sonnier told board members that the RTPark STEM enrichment program, launched at the start of this school year, is now active in nearly all public schools across the territory. “We're in every K through 8 public school in the territory, except for John H. Woodson, which had some hiccups at the beginning of the school year,” he said. The program is expected to begin at that school in the spring semester.

Currently, the after-school program operates three or four days a week and serves more than 350 students across both districts. Mr. Sonnier noted that demand continues to grow, with parents from private schools expressing interest. As a result, RTPark is now planning to expand the program beyond public schools to accommodate those requests.

RTPark’s youth engagement push also includes the establishment of two STEAM innovation centers, designed to give students greater access to science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics tools and experiences.

The first of these centers, located at the Julius E. Sprauve School on St. John, is complete and awaiting a ribbon-cutting ceremony, which is being organized by the Department of Education in coordination with Government House. The date will be announced soon, Mr. Sonnier said.

The second center, at the Eulalie Rivera School on St. Croix, remains under development.

RTPark is also preparing to launch its next 15-week idea incubator, the organization’s flagship program that supports Virgin Islanders in developing and launching digital applications. Mr. Sonnier said this year’s call for applications drew an unprecedented level of interest.

“We have a record number of applicants for this year's program, 62 total applicants,” he told the board. “I don't think we've ever had more than 30.”

Mr. Sonnier credited the surge in interest to extensive community outreach efforts conducted over the past year. “I think we're seeing the fruits of that labor,” he remarked. The incubator is scheduled to begin on October 30.

In addition to its youth and innovation programs, RTPark is participating in regional research focused on mitigating the impact of sargassum, the seaweed that has increasingly affected coastlines throughout the Virgin Islands and the wider Caribbean.

Mr. Sonnier also confirmed that RTPark’s solar farm project has been completed, marking a significant step in the organization’s renewable energy strategy. A ribbon-cutting ceremony for the project is scheduled for November 13.

“We've also applied for net billing with WAPA, so we have to wait for WAPA to come out and do their final inspection and approve us,” Mr. Sonnier said, adding that RTPark had already received nearly full reimbursement for the \$1.1 million spent on the project.

Before adjourning, RTPark board members voted unanimously to appoint William DeLone, a longstanding member of the board, as vice chairman.