

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Early Black Friday Shopping Not So Black On St. Croix This Year

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Black Friday in the Virgin Islands has always been one of the favorite shopping days because, like the U.S., it's the day the best deals become available for hot-ticket items. Although prices are not comparable to what's offered on the mainland, there are still great savings to be had.



Kmart Sears, Sunny Isle

Black Friday is also the busiest shopping day in the territory, with vehicles lining parking lots from the wee hours of the morning on the day after Thanksgiving. Long lines are formed with eager shoppers hoping to get into stores early to grab items they've been eyeing, and stoic security guards and police standing in place ready to fend off those who came with alternative intentions. After all, there's been more than a little pushing at stores like Radio Shack, Office Max, Kmart and Kmart Sears in Sunny Isle in the past, as people rush the entrances of these stores hoping to be first.

This year, however, things were not as exciting. There were a few people who gathered at the various stores at 5 a.m. on Friday looking for deals, but no sense of urgency could be detected because there was no need for it. The parking lots were not even half full, some stores that usually opened at 5 a.m. to catch the early shoppers were closed, and not even Radio Shack had the long, winding lines the retailer had grown accustomed to.







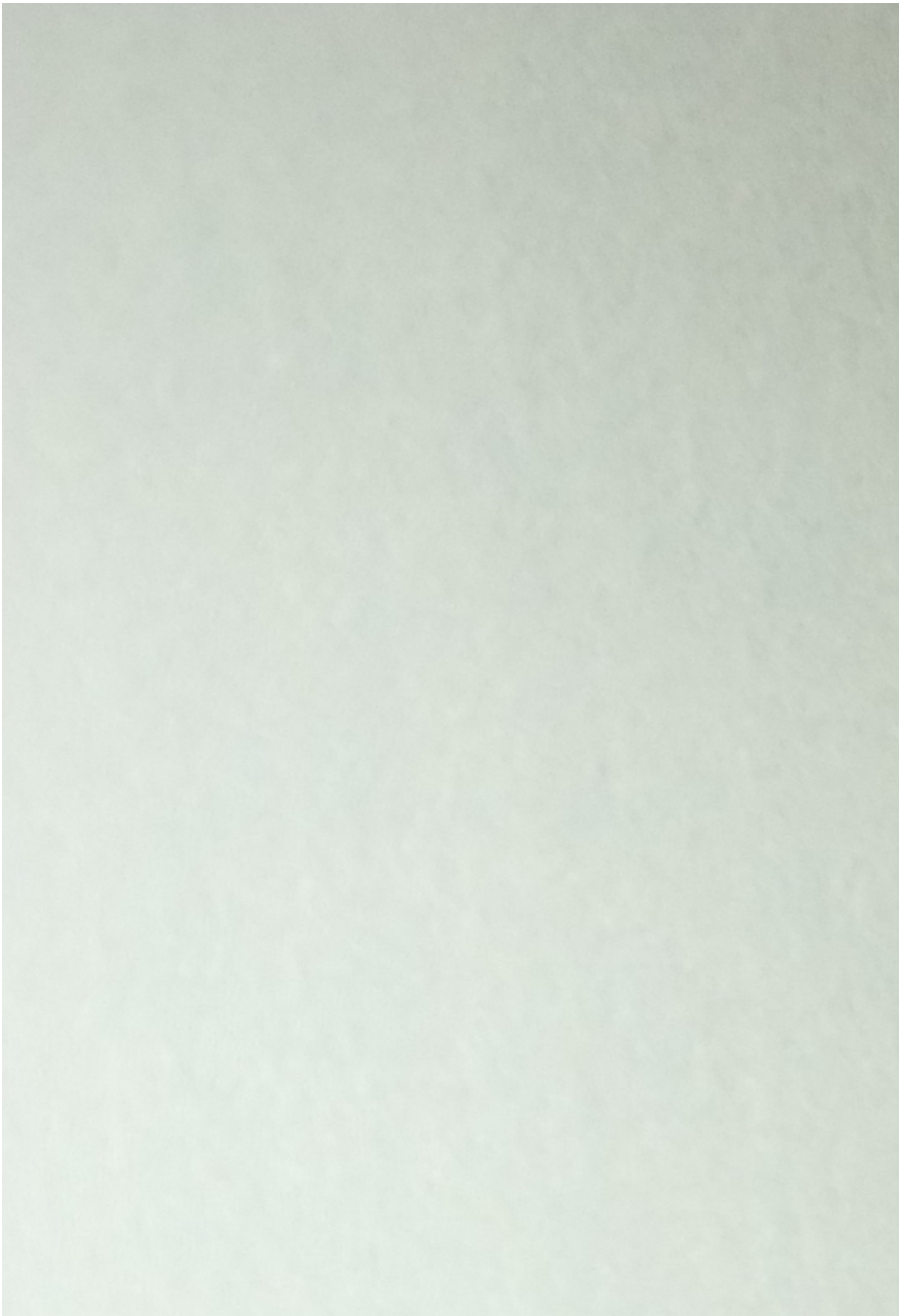




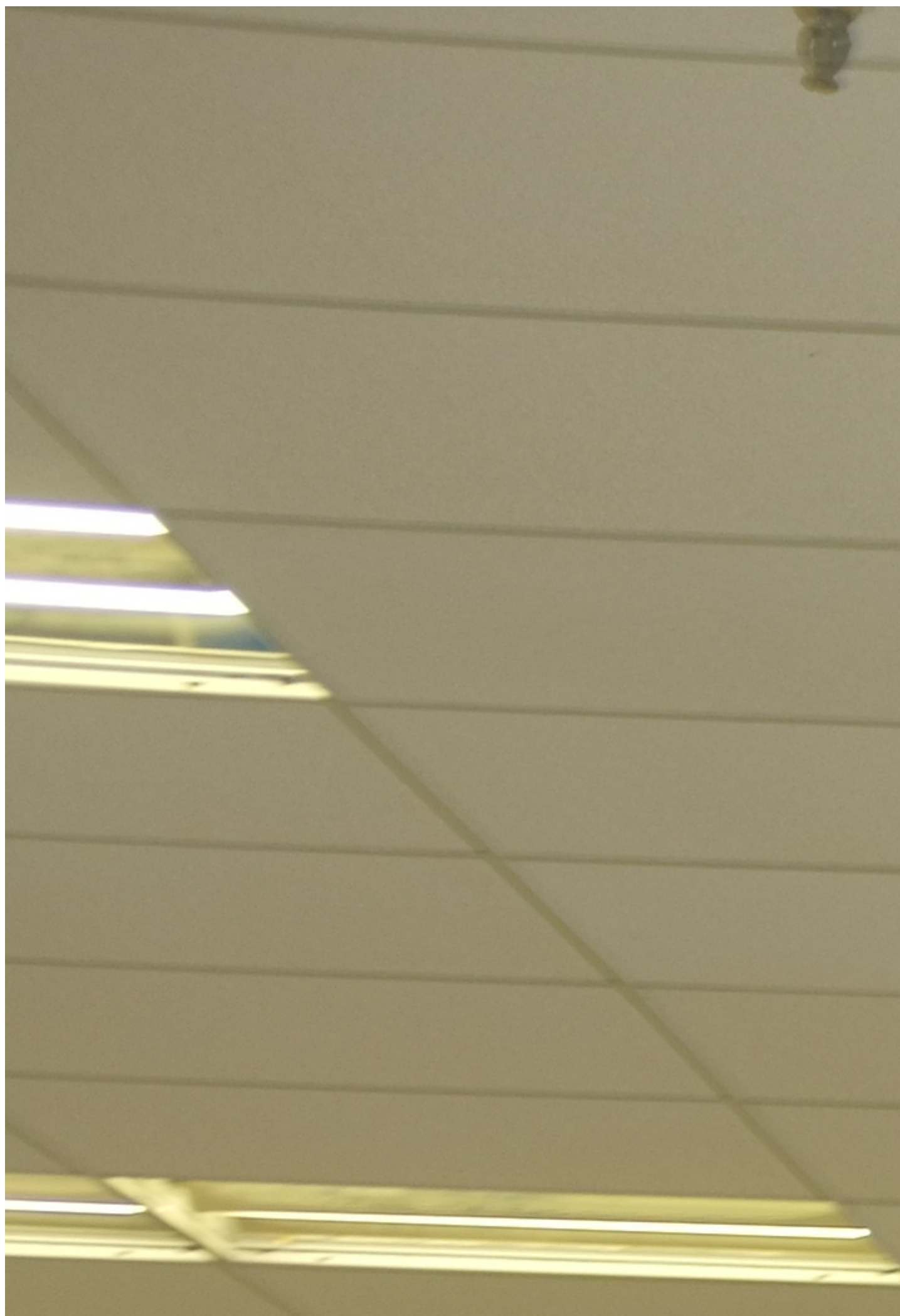


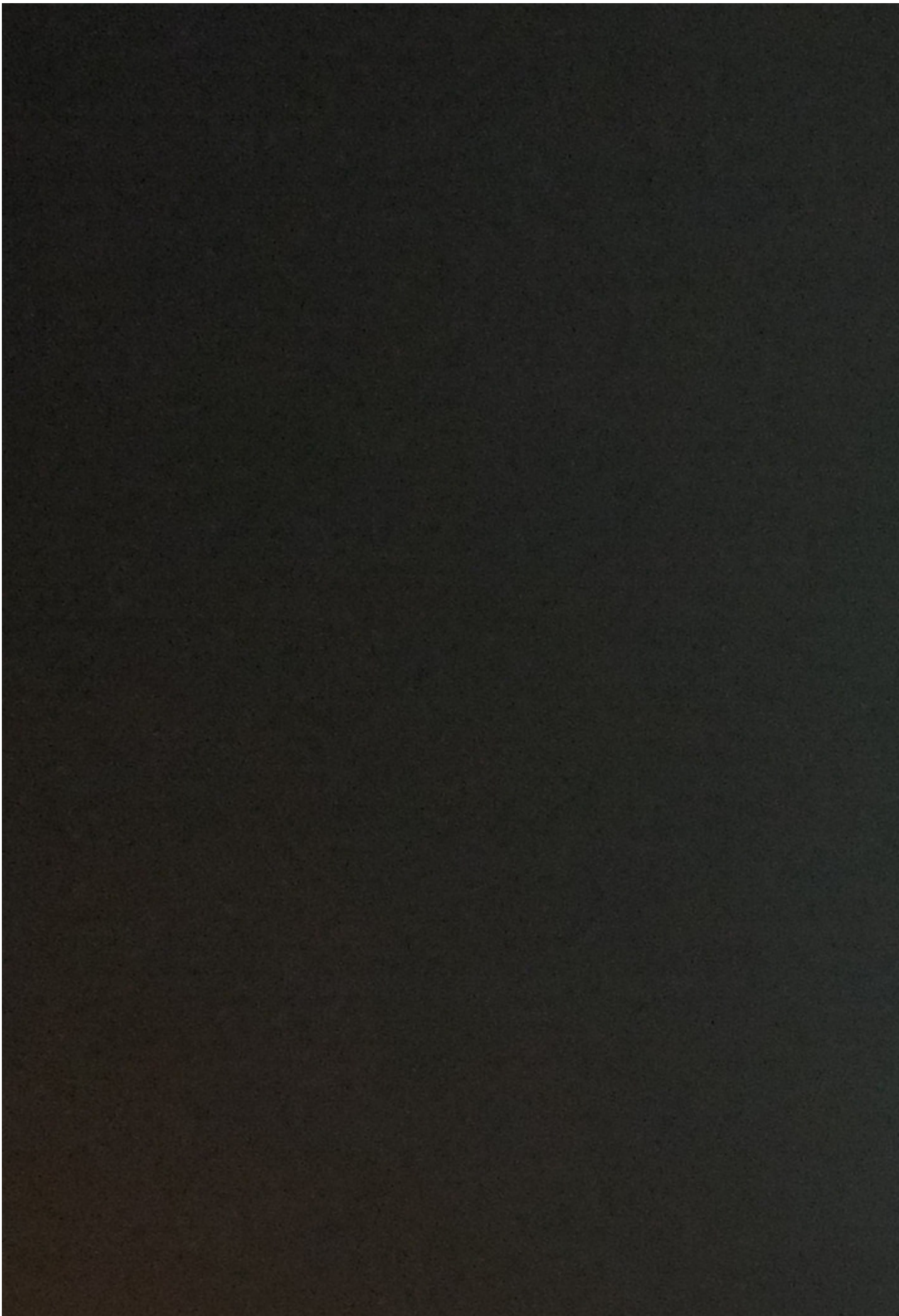






















"Ever since the refinery closed in 2012 it's been like this," one longtime employee, who is a part of the maintenance team in Sunny Isle, told the *VI Consortium*. "I remember when the parking lot would be filled with cars, and the walkways would barely have space to walk. All you would see was the heads of people, and when it all settled, you would be able to pick up money on the floor, because some people would drink, get merry and waste money out here."

A Kmart employee also spoke with the *VI Consortium* and said this Black Friday was the slowest one she's ever been a part of. Another employee, this one at Kmart Sears, said people had been coming in one-by-one all morning.

"It's the worst I've seen it," she said, adding that her husband, while dropping her off early this morning, wondered if Kmart Sears was opened at all because of the empty parking lot.

Yet, it was not all bad. People still purchased items, and as the morning sky brightened, more shoppers started coming into stores. At Kmart Sears, many shoppers could be seen purchasing HDTV sets and to a lesser extent, other items. Home Depot had a line early and although it dwindled quickly, many shoppers were spotted inside the store with loaded carts. One Home Depot employee said that while this was her first Black Friday shopping event in the past



Home Depot

It's a new reality in St. Croix for these stores already faced with high electric bills and an anemic economy, largely due to the shuttering of the HOVENSA refinery in 2012, as the veteran Sunny Isle maintenance employee noted.

This reporter remembers, well, too, in 2010, standing in an inordinate line outside of Radio Shack in order to purchase an HDTV for the first time. The 5 a.m. night sky had turned into broad daylight by the time this reporter arrived at the door. Upon entering the store, it was revealed that the last HDTV had been sold. After walking through the aisles, nothing more in the store seemed reasonable, as it appeared that previous shoppers had already snatched the good deals. But, there was lots of hustle and bustle with many shopping, talking and laughing.

This has always been a fun time in the territory, but this year, while some shoppers still managed to keep the jovial spirit associated with the season, this reporter could not help but feel somewhat deflated when looking at the unoccupied parking lots and hollow stores early on Black Friday.

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