The Virgin Islands Consortium

viNGN Courting Major Tech Firms To Territory To Take Advantage Of Fiber Network

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ST. THOMAS -- The Virgin Islands Next Generation Network (viNGN) is already in preliminary talks with major technology companies to invest in the Virgin Islands, with the business pitch being viNGN's high capacity broadband network, which boasts some of the fastest internet speeds in the U.S., bar New York and California.

Dr. Tonjia Coverdale, President of viNGN's board and CEO of the Public Finance Authority-owned firm, confirmed to *VI Consortium* that talks are already ongoing, however she did not divulge names because the discussions are still in early stages.

During her talk at viNGN's board meeting on Monday in St. Thomas, Coverdale made mention of Google Fiber, and said it's companies like the Mountain View, California-based technology firm that will be attracted to the over 1000 megabits of speeds that viNGN offers, adding that the opportunity to grow the territory's tech sector is ripe.

The high bandwidth capability that viNGN offers is indeed attractive to companies like Google, Microsoft, Apple and others that are constantly looking for new places to invest money, whether to house new data centers, research and development arms, or other important, cost-heavy investments that usually boost the local economies where they are based.

For example, in 2007, Google started construction of a data center in Council Bluffs, Iowa, which has a population of 61,969 people. The company has committed to long-term investments in the data center of $2.5 billion; has donated $820,000 to nonprofits, schools, and organizations with an impact in Iowa since 2009; awarded $204,000 WIFI grant to the City of Council Bluffs to help implement a free downtown WiFi network; and its data centers consume 50 percent less energy when compared to typical data centers.

According to ZDnet, Google recently announced another $1 billion investment into its Council Bluffs data center, which will add 70 new jobs to the local economy.

In a recent Q&A, Coverdale told *VI Consortium* that the opportunity of broadband internet in the Virgin Islands through viNGN, will welcome new information-based businesses with “hundreds of local jobs,” and that “viNGN has a responsibility to our fellow Virgin Islanders to invest in, and build our communities by serving as a foundation for technology education for our children and adults, both young and seasoned, and creating a local technology workforce to begin circulating within our economy those millions of technology dollars that would usually go out of the territory.”

The CEO conveyed her full vision for viNGN at yesterday's board meeting. She also committed to helping Governor Kenneth Mapp streamline communications among government agencies through viNGN. The governor revealed at the meeting that he will be signing an executive order on Friday to place the Virgin Islands Bureau of Information Technology under viNGN.

“I’m going to be signing an executive order which I will effectively place the Bureau of Information Technology of the Central Government under the control of viNGN,” Mapp said.

The territory's leader added that one of the first priorities he would like to see the new viNGN/BIT undertake, is the public safety/first responder interconnectivity, because the “whole first responding community is in complete disarray when it comes to being able to communicate, to use any level or type of technology at work, in their vehicles and 911 system reporting,” the governor said. And while he acknowledged that the undertaking will be great, first responder interconnectivity remains a top priority for Mapp, because it directly affects the safety of the territory’s communities.