

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Crime Stoppers USVI, Founded In 2009, Shuts Down

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ST. CROIX -- In a small room upstairs the St. Croix Foundation building in downtown Christiansted, officials of Crime Stoppers USVI shared with members of the press that the organization would be shutting its doors; not because of the lack of funds, but as former Sen. Judi Buckley told *The Consortium* moments before the event started, there has been a steep drop in cooperation by the Virgin Islands Police Department.

Buckley, a Chairperson and board member of Crime Stoppers USVI, said the decision to halt operations was difficult but one that had to be made nonetheless. She said the collaboration between VIPD and Crime Stoppers has historically been at a level that would allow them to continue operating, "but there's been a real decline in the last couple of years and what Crime Stoppers really needs is for VIPD to hire someone who's

specifically dedicated to working with us and making sure that all our tips are followed up on, investigated and communicated back to us so we know when we can pay a reward, and that hasn't happened."

Asked if Crime Stoppers would change its decision following the announcement if the VIPD reached out and decided to provide the group with what it's asking for, Buckley said Crime Stoppers would not altogether close its doors, as it will keep open its bank account, (although donations won't be accepted) and after six months and an assessment, a determination will be made on whether to move forward or completely shutter operations.

"It will be based on law enforcement's level of engagement and commitment and our own board's level of motivation to operate under these challenging circumstances," said Julien Henley, a Crime Stoppers board member for seven years.

Since opening its doors in 2009, the 2272 tips the VIPD received through Crime Stoppers have resulted in the arrest of 214 individuals; the recovery of 97 weapons; \$732,138 in property recovery and confiscated drugs; and a total of 80 rewards amounting to \$68,606. 114 rewards remain unpaid, according to statistics the group provided.

But even with the above numbers, Crime Stoppers officials say citizens have accused the group of not doing its job of arresting people. However, the organization stressed that it's not in the business of making arrests, "our job is to collect information anonymously and pass it on to law enforcement," Henley said.

And in relation to more rewards being released, the group said "if tips are not investigated and feedback isn't provided, we cannot pay a reward for the information."

Henley said Crime Stoppers will halt its weekly releases and the VIPD will continue to work the current tips already provided.