

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Thirty-Three New Peace Officers Take Oath Of Office At Government House

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ST. CROIX -- With the backdrop being a rash of violent and deadly crimes that continue to disturb the territory, 33 new peace officers took the oath of office at Government House here on Monday, adding a much-needed boost to law enforcement arms in their quest to protect residents and enforce the islands' laws.

The commencement exercise took place in the building's second floor ballroom, filled with family members who came to support their loved ones, and dignitaries who either participated in the ceremony, or attended in honor of the new officers.

Of the 33 officers, 16 will join the Virgin Islands Police Department, 6 will be assigned to the Bureau of Corrections, 2 to the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority, 5 will become Superior Court marshals, 1 will join the Virgin Islands Port Authority, 1 will be assigned to the Virgin Islands Legislature, and 1 will serve in the Office of the Governor, according to information provided by the VIPD.

The men and women proudly took the oath of office in the light-spirited affair, accented by humorless moments when guest speakers spoke of the seriousness of a career in recent times have been



Thirty-three new peace

officers take the oath of office at a Government House ceremony in Christiansted in Monday.

Governor Kenneth Mapp said the community needs to be more forthcoming in sharing information with police, and reiterated his promise to send local officers to the New York City Police Department to receive training. He also congratulated the new recruits on their achievement and assured them his full support.

Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter encouraged graduates to resist the urge of complicity, which he admitted is difficult because "we know everybody." And Police Commissioner Delroy Richards, who noted the criminal element of this time as younger and more violent, said the Virgin Islands must forge ahead with a strategy to quell the senseless violence; stating that the territory could not afford to continue losing its young men.

Guest speaker Police Sergeant Deborah Hodge-Jack, gave solemn remarks about the job of a police officer. She told the graduates that they would question their decision to join the force, and momentarily think that they'd made a "big mistake." But she encouraged the young adults to persevere through hardship, and quoted scriptures aimed at building one's character and morale.

As each new officer rose to take the oath of office, roaring cheers erupted from the audience, the loudest coming from members of the graduating group, apparently stemming from a bond nurtured during training. Raging Eagles, they are called, a mix of both male and female, who signed up for one of the most trying careers on earth.

Even so, a sense of pride overtook the ballroom as the new officers taking the oath office were pinned by Mr. Richards.

At the overcrowded south entrance of the ballroom, a senator sought passage to enter. He threaded his way behind the dignitaries seated at the front, facing north, and moved to the west area where the pinning was underway. Proudly, he temporarily positioned himself in Mr. Richards' spot, grabbed a badge and, with a smile consuming his face -- and that of the recipient -- the senator, Kenneth Gittens, proudly pinned his daughter, Officer Shonneth Gittens, who followed in her father's footsteps to serve the people of the Virgin Islands.