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## \$60 Million HUD-Funded Homeowner Rehabilitation Program Kicks off This Month

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Homeowner Aracelis Cepeda (front, center), (left to right) Armand Corp. Project Manager Bevan Smith, VIHFA Construction Manager Michael Moreau and Uncle Nev Construction rep. Orlando Ramirez stand in front of Cepeda's home in St. Croix slated to be repaired by the VI Housing Finance Authority

The Envision Tomorrow Homeowner Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Program has issued its first set of Notices to Proceed (NTP) to contractors, kicking off active construction in the highly-anticipated housing recovery program, the V.I. Housing Finance Authority has announced.

According to the release, homes in St. Croix will be under construction in June to repair damages sustained during Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017. Rehabilitation work includes roof repairs,

replacing windows, tiles, electrical upgrades, etc.

“The authority is happy to begin the construction phase of the Envision Tomorrow Homeowner Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Program. We’re committed to delivering quality service while fully complying with strict HUD policies and guidelines in every stage of a lengthy process while navigating around challenges such as Covid-19,” said V.I.H.F.A. Executive Director Daryl Griffith. “Now many homes are in queue to receive their Notice to Proceed in the coming weeks and months.”

The Envision Tomorrow Program is funded through the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, while the \$766 million Sheltering & Temporary Essential Power (STEP) Programs is funded through the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

According to V.I.F.H.A., following the onboarding of the construction management firm, Armand in October 2019, inspectors begun damage assessments to hundreds of eligible applicants in the program. Once damage assessments were complete, all properties went through a HUD-mandated environmental review to check for mold, asbestos and lead-based paint. The eligibility process included a review of duplication of benefits, residency, low to moderate income verification and proof of storm damage.

“I am very proud that over 90 percent of the contractors on this program are local,” Mr. Griffith said.

V.I.H.F.A. said over 50 local general contractors are registered partners, and they are awarded projects based on their performance record and capacity to perform repairs on homes in a reasonable amount of time. Contractor’s must adhere to strict delivery timelines developed by the V.I.H.F.A. Planning & Construction team, the authority said . Project timelines range from two weeks to six months based on the severity of storm damage.

“Building a long-term recovery program from the ground up is a lengthy process given the Territory’s limited access to ready and available construction material. The entire team at the VIHFA is committed to following the federal guidelines and incorporating our applicants’ input. As we achieve this milestone, we thank residents for their continued patience as we work towards rebuilding hurricane-damaged homes,” V.I.H.F.A. Chief Disaster Recovery Officer David Martin said.

The Envision Tomorrow program is funded by an initial \$60 million CDBG-DR grant from the U.S. Housing HUD and is designed to assist homeowners and landlords whose properties were heavily damaged by Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017.