

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Office Of Veterans Affairs Holds First V.I. Veterans Health Expo

VIC News / **Published On June 24, 2016 12:51 PM /**

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ST. CROIX -- The Office of Veterans Affairs held its first health exhibition here on Tuesday, which doubled as a registration drive -- an effort Veterans Affairs Director Patrick Farrell says is the first of an annual affair aimed at better caring for veterans in the territory and also encouraging them to live healthier lifestyles.

The event was held in the Sunshine Mall on the lower floor, and saw a diverse group of organizations offering free health services to veterans. The Virgin Islands Department of Health, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Virgin Islands National Guard, along with the local V.A. were among the organizations playing greater roles at yesterday's expo. D.O.H. services included blood tests, and the department's health van was

stationed outside the mall providing free H.I.V. tests.

"We have this geared towards veterans coming out and being screened and educated as to how they could live a healthier lifestyle," Mr. Farrell said.

Service members scantily attended the exhibition, but that was blamed on scheduling conflicts as many members work during the day, and the need for more advertising. Those issues will be rectified at following events, said retired Sergeant Major Sandra Benjamin, who assisted Mr. Farrell with organizing.

Nonetheless, service members who did attend found the expo to be informative and beneficial.

"It has been a very nice experience," said Kerriise Richards. "I would recommend that a lot more of the veterans as well as people in the community come out because it's very beneficial." Ms. Richards said the event helped in conveying the V.I. National Guard's mission in the territory. "We are here to first support our community," she noted, "and it actually shows them that we care and we're not just here in the time of need."

Sergeant Wanson Harris said he would have liked to see more of the territory's younger veterans in attendance -- those between ages 23-30 -- "to know that there are services being provided for them."

Other services at yesterday's event included screenings, pedicures and manicures and more.