

The Virgin Islands Consortium

H.H. Tire And Battery Said To Be Reopening In New Location 'In Next Few Weeks'

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ST. CROIX -- In a statement issued on its Facebook page late Monday, H.H. Tire & Battery -- the landmark business that had been in operation on this island for 52 years, which was consumed by fire in the wee hours of Monday -- said that the business's battery and tire operation would reopen "in the next weeks" at a temporary location.

The announcement, serving as welcome news to displaced H.H. employees, comes as the company's original location was thoroughly destroyed by fire, leaving even the building's frame vulnerable to collapsing, according to VI Fire Service Lieutenant Paul Christian.

H.H. also thanked government departments involved in containing the blaze, to including the VI Fire Service and the V.I.P.D. And it expressed gratitude to the community for its concern, according to the statement, and "positive thoughts."

"The H.H. Tire and Battery family would like to thank the St. Croix community for all their support during this difficult time," [reads the statement](#). "We are very thankful to the St. Croix Fire & Rescue team and the Virgin Island Police Department for their tireless efforts. We appreciate the positive thoughts and concerns from our community."

It continued: "Our main focus at this time is to restore our local family business so we can continue to support our employees and their families. We plan to have our battery and tire operations up and running in the next few weeks. Please stay tuned for more details on our temporary location. We look forward to continuing to serve the St. Croix community as we have for over 50 years."

An all-consuming fire

The building's roof had caved in; vehicles belonging to residents that stayed at the facility overnight for repairs were left with only their body frames; smoke from burned tires, batteries and other items letting off toxic plumes engulfed the skies and spread west, causing the closure of at least six schools, according to the Department of Education. The Superior Court also shuttered half-day, and classes at the St. Croix Career and Technical Education Center — with the inclusion of the Adult Secondary Education Program — were canceled.

According to Lt. Christian, the cause of the fire remains unknown. He said once the smoke had subsided, the department's fire investigators would begin the process of searching for clues relative to what caused the building to burn. Insurance inspectors would also do their own investigation into the incident, he said.

Fire Service Director Clifford Joseph expressed remorse late Monday for both the owners of H.H. Tire & Battery, as well as the employees who are now out of work.

"I really feel sorry for not only the owner but the employees, because the employees hit a wall," he said. "Fire destroys and it takes away from you."

Some Department of Public Works personnel were also on the scene to help Fire Service personnel bulldoze the walls on either side of the building to get in, as the facility's industrial doors were shut. The building was destroyed from front to back, as the flames ruined every section of the venerable business; H.H. Tire & Battery was a stalwart in the community that employed many, and had been in existence for 52 years, according to a blurb on the company's website.

While the fire was still raging in the wee hours of Monday morning, loud explosions — possibly from batteries and other combustible products — rocked the Castle Coakley neighborhood. The fire was so fierce that the heat could be felt all the way to the Bates Trucking entrance. Multiple fire trucks worked around the clock to contain the blaze, and in a stroke of luck, they were aided by rain, which came heavily at dawn, dousing the fire with an incessant pouring.

Started by Howard Hensley in 1964, H.H. Tire & Battery had become a go-to location for vehicle maintenance. The company was "built on the foundation of providing quality

products and outstanding customer service for a reasonable price,” reads the website. The firm had since grown to become the largest shop of its kind on the island.

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