

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Is AT&T A Good Corporate Citizen or Irresponsible Guest?

Opinion / **Published On February 02, 2017 02:02 PM /**

Staff **February 02, 2017**



Take a drive along the scenic North Side road in Frederiksted, past the beaches, past the old sugarcane estates and you'll come across a non-descript building, fortified heavily behind iron gates, steel fencing and numerous surveillance cameras. The only signs along the iron gates are warnings that trespassing onto or causing damage to the property is against the law. How ironic, since the Company behind those gates --AT&T-- seems to have little regard for the rule of law in the Virgin Islands.

AT&T gives the impression that the Virgin Islands are just an outpost of the U.S. located in the Caribbean that is beyond the reach of federal law. The Company has insinuated that federal labor law does not extend to the Virgin Islands and that somehow residents

of the Virgin Islands don't have the same rights as their fellow US citizens. These kinds of statements have confused and confounded AT&T's employees in the Virgin Islands and their union representative, the Communications Workers of America. What exactly does AT&T think about the legal status of the Virgin Islands?

AT&T's actions and its view of the Virgin Islands have been purely self-serving as demonstrated by the way AT&T does business here. One simply has to examine AT&T's brief history on the island of St. Croix to see how a corporation, if left unchecked by laws that apply to the rest of us, will engage in a pattern of selfishness, misdeeds and outright greed. During the construction of its submarine cable landing station in the mid-1990s, AT&T caused one of the largest environmental catastrophes on St. Croix, which resulted in the permanent pollution of several acres of the fragile undersea environment. Rather than accept responsibility, AT&T began a 'spin' campaign to minimize the true extent of the pollution. Then it retreated inside its non-descript building, safeguarded behind that big iron gate. And why did AT&T decide not to have its name appear anywhere on or near the premises, further isolating itself from the community? Why has AT&T avoided any corporate relations or civic interaction with our small island community?

Further, a nearby business owner recently registered complaints regarding the excessive environmental noise pollution being created by the massive cooling machinery purchased for the lucrative and very secretive location. These cooling plants were installed without regard for or feedback from the surrounding residents. This is not surprising: since arriving on the island in the mid-nineties, AT&T has shown a fundamental lack of respect to the local government and the surrounding environment.

Now, AT&T has extended this lack of respect to its ten full-time employees in the Virgin Islands. These long time employees, many with more than twenty years of service, have been locked in an **unprecedented fifteen-month bargaining struggle** simply to achieve the compensation and job equity enjoyed by their mainland counterparts. The bargaining issues between the Communications Workers of America and AT&T are not solely economic but also involve other working conditions for these Virgin Islanders. AT&T has been using divisive tactics and inconsistent arguments regarding job responsibilities, work titles and salary comparisons. These tactics are being utilized as a means to keep this group of local employees, which it refers to as **"offshore" workers**, from being able to transfer to offices on the mainland that house the same work, and from attaining pay comparable to their Stateside co-workers. AT&T needs to recognize the contributions that the Virgin Islands employees add to the community, the territory, and to its own business on a daily basis.

AT&T's Virgin Islands employees and the Communications Workers of America are reaching out to the Virgin Islands community for support during our difficult negotiations with AT&T in order to make clear to this US corporation that **Virgin Islands workers are U.S. citizens** who deserve equity in wages, benefits and working conditions. We believe that AT&T has benefited from its presence in the Virgin Islands and should commit to an atmosphere of respect and equitable treatment for these workers who are committed to its success. The entire Virgin Islands benefits from good corporate citizens who demonstrate an interest in the progress of the community that has contributed to its prosperity.

Help make our voices heard. **Please contact AT&T: 1-214-757-8071** or wh5718@att.com and communicate that workers in the Virgin Islands deserve a fair and equitable contract. Thank you.

In Unity,

Roy Hegenbart,

President Local 3250, Communications Workers of America

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