

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Virgin Islanders In Houston Organize 'HOPE' Drive To Aid Diaspora Affected By Harvey. Here's How You Can Help

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Virgin Islanders living in Houston, Texas, were not shielded from the devastation Hurricane Harvey unleashed on the city -- the fourth largest in the U.S. -- for more than four days. And they've not sat idly waiting for aid to come by, either.

Instead, the VI diaspora banded together, formed a team to help with the general rescue efforts, and has now organized what has been dubbed a "HOPE" effort, to aid Virgin Islanders who were adversely affected by the storm -- including those who lost their homes.

That's according to Sherlin Gifford of Suga Promotions, who lives in Texas. Ms. Gifford told The Consortium on Wednesday that a group of organizations owned by Virgin Islanders, as well as individuals from the territory both at home and abroad, have banded together to serve as a conduit for VI residents looking to provide support to their fellow Virgin Islanders in Texas. They include Ms. Gifford, Lawton Prince of V.I Massive Ent., located in the Baytown area of Houston, along with St. Croix Educational Complex Class of 2005 President Janeisha John, Maheeah Christopher, also a member of S.C.E.C. Class of 2005, and Central High School Class of 2005 member Cliaunjel Mulley.

"We are reaching out to the people of the Virgin Islands to assist with our HOPE, Hurricane Harvey Food & Clothes Drive," wrote Ms. Gifford. "We are asking the community to donate clothes, shoes, hygiene products, non perishable food items to include canned and boxed goods, gift cards and school supplies, as part of our restorative plan in Houston, Baytown. As many may know, Hurricane Harvey has caused an extreme amount of damage to the homes and cars of some of our own local residents."

Ms. Gifford said the HOPE team is seeking the assistance of local shipping companies, to include VI Cargo and Tropical Shipping, as Virgin Islanders in the territory have already started to reach out to provide goods. She said aside from the general drive, which will see goods being delivered to all Virgin Islanders affected by Harvey, the team will also assist families on St. Croix who want to send aid directly to their loved ones.

There are two drop-off locations on St. Croix: Centerline Bakery in Estate Mountain, and Centerline Bakery (adjacent to Beijing Restaurant) near Plaza Extra East. If you want to assist in the local effort, call Ms. Gifford at 832-829-0831, Mr. Prince at 832-414-2572, or Mrs. Mulley at 340-332-4568. The HOPE team will also be posting updates to the following Facebook pages: Suga Apple, Lawton Blacks, V.I Boss Weekes and Wilbo Parris.

"As proud representatives of the Virgin Islands, we would like to thank the community and our family members who have been sending well wishes and showed an enormous amount of concern to the people who have been affected in Texas by this catastrophic hurricane," Ms. Gifford said.

She told The Consortium on Wednesday that despite the havoc that Havery has wreaked, the Virgin Islands diaspora in Houston were grateful for life, and remained optimistic about recovering.

"To be honest, everyone is in a joyous mood, everyone is just willing to help. The storm has been going on for two days, and we have Virgin Islanders and other Caribbean people out there in the water assisting. Everybody's just joyful that they have their lives. Nobody is really down about the situation, and the fact that we have so many people reaching out to us, it has our spirits high," Ms. Gifford said.