

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Post-Hurricane Black Friday Rush Nonexistent On St. Croix

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ST. CROIX -- The deals may still be there, the items may still be stocked on the store shelves, but St. Croix residents did not overwhelm the parking lots of Kmart East and Kmart West, or Home Depot's, in the wee hours of Friday morning seeking steep discounts on a variety of items, as has been the longstanding tradition on the day following Thanksgiving known as Black Friday.

Not too long ago, the event was an anticipated experience, with thousands of Virgin Islanders waking up earlier than usual to snatch deals ahead of competing residents. Even post-HOVENSA days saw decent lines at a range of stores -- from jewelry to electronics -- with the big names like Home Depot, Office Depot, Radio Shack (now

shuttered), Kmart and other smaller outfits opening early.

Marthious Clavier, who this year woke up early along with his wife to buy a television at Kmart, reminisced on just three years ago, when he stood in line at Office Depot (formerly Office Max), and waited for about an hour and a half to get in for a laptop computer. "The lines were ten times as long as this," he told The Consortium this morning, referring to a measly line with about 10 or so people who stood outside Kmart East waiting to get in at 5:00 a.m.

Kmart West was no different, and Home Depot, too, was unexciting: gone was the traditional rush that made Black Friday not only a day to pickup items on good deals, but also an exciting kickoff of the holiday season.

The dwindling experience that is Black Friday in the U.S. Virgin Islands, especially this year, can be attributed to a number of factors. First, the territory was ravaged by two Category 5 hurricanes, leaving all the islands without power for weeks. That meant residents who could afford had to find funds to first buy generators, then bore the cost of keeping the machines running. And that's currently the case for most of the USVI, as a majority of the territory is still without power.

Mr. Clavier said having power helped in cementing his and his wife's decision to come out early. For those without power, though, the idea of trying to get ready in the dark may have been enough reason to stay home, he said.

Another factor that affected this year's turnout was the migration of Virgin Islanders to the U.S. mainland. While over 3,200 Virgin Islanders left the territory on mercy cruises and flights immediately after the storms, others left as soon as the airports reopened.

And then there's the elephant in the room: The USVI's economy has for years been anemic, with an unemployment rate that is [more than twice the national average](#). Recent layoffs in the hospitality sector (major hotels in St. Thomas have laid off well over a 1,000 full-time and part-time employees) have only compounded the issue.

While the decline of Black Friday speaks to the above factors and others, Mr. Clavier saw a personal benefit. "I don't have to wait too long to get in," he laughed.

As Kmart East opened its doors and the small line of people started to walk in, this reporter followed behind. Inside the store, the atmosphere that normally accompanies such events could not be felt. No rushing for carts, no grabbing of televisions and other hot items, and no frantic-looking employees and security guards trying to contain pandemonium, because there was no need to.

Deeper into the store, in its electronics department, Mr. Clavier had already secured what he came for: a 55" television, which he got on a great deal and had to purchase because the last one they owned suddenly stopped working. There was only one in the store, which would be near impossible to snatch during past Black Friday events. "I got what I came for and I'm ready to leave," he said.