

The Virgin Islands Consortium

It's Been One Year Since Hurricane Maria Ravaged St. Croix

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ST. CROIX -- It was almost unbelievable what was happening. [St. Thomas](#) and [St. John](#), less than two weeks earlier, had been devastated by Hurricane Irma, and St. Croix was already [serving as a staging ground](#) to help the territory recover. Residents of the Big Island, as St. Croix is called, had demonstrated immense benevolence to their fellowmen in the St. Thomas-St. John District by sending boatloads of supplies --everything from generators, to canned goods, blankets and ice -- to help make survival less stressful.

Ships unable to dock elsewhere were already arriving on St. Croix, as the island was set to benefit from the misfortune of its neighbors.

But brewing in the Atlantic was a storm called Hurricane Maria, which grew into a monstrosity in days and walloped a number of Caribbean islands -- Dominica receiving the hardest hit -- on its way to the U.S. Virgin Islands, more specifically St. Croix.

The headlines were daunting: "[Hurricane Maria is Now a Cat 5 Storm; St. Croix to Sustain Direct Impact](#)", read one VI Consortium headline, quoting the whether services. Another said, "[This is It: St. Croix Braces for Impact as Potentially Catastrophic Cat 5 Hurricane Maria Arrives](#)".

And so on the night of September 19, 2017, it began. Hurricane-force winds along with incessant rain roared through the night as residents -- many at the time still with internet service and power -- posted their courageous and sometimes sad stories online. These stories foretold what would become apparent the morning of September 20, 2017: Hurricane Maria had badly damaged St. Croix, ravaging countless homes, destroying countless roofs, and wrecking a number of schools. The island was without power for months, as the Water and Power Authority, along with its mainland contractors, worked around the clock to restore power.

Nightly press conferences by the Mapp administration were used to inform residents of daily actions; lines made circles around supermarkets as residents tried to keep their cupboards filled; gas stations were constantly running out of fuel; and curfews kept the streets empty at nights. Amid the chaos, uplifting stories of residents mobilizing to help those in need rose to prominence on social media. There was especially a big push from USVI diasporas who shipped trailers of items to the territory for distribution.

Below, some quotes from The Consortium's [story on Maria's passage](#), which was published on September 20, 2017.

Some roofs became undone by the ferocious winds and were in the process of being violently ripped off their frames. For others, water poured through openings that had given into the force of Hurricane Maria (in some areas on St. Croix, particularly the island's southwest portion, the winds came in at max strength: 175 miles per hour, with higher gusts.)

Families in compromised homes corralled themselves in closets, under tables — or anywhere the human instinct of survival directed them to. Some watched helplessly as the frail frame of their homes rocked back and forth at Maria's command, fearing that at any moment the walls would cave in. In Harbor View Apartments, a housing community in Five Corners, glass shattered under Maria's unrelenting pressure. In the same housing community, a portion of an apartment fell on its occupants' vehicle. Harbor View appeared to be a similar scenario — though not as dire — to Tutu High Rise, a St. Thomas housing complex left in a ruinous state by Irma, [where hurricane-force winds roared through the walls of multiple homes, leaving gaping holes](#).

For many, it seemed as if the storm would never end; Hurricane Maria gnawing winds and rain began assaulting the U.S. Virgin Islands from 2:00 p.m., its hurricane-force winds started at around 10:00 p.m., and the storm did not cease until 5:30 a.m. Thursday. With incessant force, it slammed St. Croix from east to west, destroying many homes in the process.

When daylight appeared, the wreckage Maria left behind was blunt. Homes once hidden by trees were suddenly visible as the hurricane mowed through the island, and any hope that lingered about electricity quickly being restored after the storm, was dashed: From east to west, almost every utility pole was either completely mangled or badly damaged. If it were not for the quick response of first responders (New York State Troopers, Dept. of Homeland Security Puerto Rico, and V.I. National Guard personnel were seen with chainsaws clearing roads early Wednesday), St. Croix's thoroughfares would still be impassible with trees whose roots had snapped, unable to withstand Maria's constant battering.

A solar energy field at the District court of the Virgin Islands in Golden Rock was laid to waste; Pepper Tree Terrace looked like a nuclear bomb had detonated there; KFC in Sunny Isle was defaced, so too was women's clothing store Rainbow; at least 50 percent of homes in Williams Delight had lost roofs or were otherwise damaged; some homes in neighboring communities were flooded; at one location, a utility pole had fallen on a home, compromising its structure.

One year later, St. Croix has come a long way, with power fully restored and insurance companies making progress on payments to homeowners, among other encouraging signs. Yet a number of problems have yet to be completely solved. On education, for example, the Mapp administration continues to struggle with reopening schools, and teachers have taken to the streets to protest unfavorable working conditions while calling for wage increases. And the territory's hospitals have yet to recover (Governor Mapp is expected to make an announcement to that end, soon), with many patients leaving the territory for sometimes basic procedures.