The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Sign Of Improving Economy, Residents Territory-Wide Braved Lines On Black Friday

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ST. CROIX -- Black Friday in the U.S. Virgin Islands, though not back to its heyday, a time that may never return because of the internet, saw strong turnout as residents territory-wide braved the early morning dew to catch deals, while others shopped throughout the day.

The bounce-back comes one year after the territory was devastated by two Category 5 storms, when shopping was the last thing on Virgin Islanders' minds.

But on Friday, from Big Kmart in Frederiksted to the super store in the Tutu Park Mall, residents woke up early and stayed in lines to purchase desired items that were part of

Black Friday sales. (Kmart West lost power sometime in the morning on Friday, and shoppers had to wait outside for a moment, as seen in this story's feature image.) Nonetheless, shoppers were determined to spend money.

Prior to the 2017 hurricanes, Black Friday had dwindled almost to a halt in the U.S. Virgin Islands, as the territory struggled with a weak economy that had been left devastated following the closure of the HOVENSA refinery in 2012. The economy remained unstable with high unemployment in the early years of the Mapp administration. However, Mr. Mapp's efforts to jolt the economy, among them the opening of an oil storage terminal, the governor's approval of a private sector minimum wage increase to $10.50, his executive order that raised the minimum wage of government employees to $13 per hour ; the base wage increase of government employees, including police officers and teachers to roughly $44,000, and the surge in construction work that was realized following the 2017 storms, among other efforts from the administration, helped in slashing the unemployment rate below double digits.

The administration also recently secured an oil refining deal, which is projected to add 1,200 temporary and 700 permanent jobs to the south shore facility on St. Croix. This is expected to further boost the local economy -- already in an upswing because of hurricane recovery commerce -- to new heights.

As for Black Friday returning to its heyday, when lines made circles around the Sunny Isle mall walkway, those days will most likely not return, not because the economy is weak, but because of the rise of online shopping, where any item can be purchase at more attractive prices through mega retailers such as Amazon.