

The Virgin Islands Consortium

BDO, A USVI Firm, Partners With Witt O'Brien's To Manage Territory's Disaster Recovery Projects

VIC News / **Published On February 11, 2019 10:50 PM /**

Staff **February 11, 2019**



Fourteen highly skilled local professionals have been hired by St. Thomas-based BDO USVI, a professional services firm partnering with FEMA contractor Witt O'Brien's to implement a program management office (PMO) that will work across all governmental entities receiving federal disaster funding to help ensure the territory's hundreds of reconstruction projects are completed in the most efficient and cost-effective manner, a release BDO issued Monday said.

According to the release, the close-knit BDO USVI PMO group will operate within the Public Finance Authority's (PFA) newly established Office of Disaster Recovery, which will provide strategic oversight for the expected \$8 billion in federal disaster recovery

funds allotted to the USVI.

The new hires selected for the PMO, a first in the territory, have many years of experience in analytics, project management and communications in various industries, the release said. One employee, Melania Girigoria, who joined BDO USVI's PMO as a project analyst, was in the process of relocating when she was contacted about the new opportunity.

"I was literally packing items into a moving box and had already ended my lease when I received the call," she said.

It didn't take long for Ms. Girigoria to agree to come on board—a decision she was happy to make, according to the release.

"There aren't many opportunities locally for persons with my project management or technical skills, so I was very thankful for this role, which gives me the opportunity to give back to my community while doing work that I love," she said.

At the start of the USVI recovery program, Witt O'Brien's and the Government of the Virgin Islands made a commitment to transition some of the management of the program and skilled technical positions to local professionals as soon as possible. The release said the this transition is being accelerated by the new partnership between BDO USVI and Witt O'Brien's, whose business relationship began shortly after the hurricanes in late 2017.

The release said BDO USVI's PMO Director Alain Leroy praised the partnership with Witt O'Brien's as one that puts local professionals back to work and contributes to stopping the local 'brain drain'—a phenomenon that sees skilled professionals leaving the Territory in search of better employment and career opportunities.

"Our partner Witt O'Brien's has afforded BDO USVI a remarkable opportunity that has allowed us to hire topnotch, homegrown talent from St. Thomas and St. Croix," he said. "This shows the commitment of Witt O'Brien's to ensure federal funds for local disaster recovery benefit the local community in every way."

"We're happy to welcome the BDO USVI team," said Brad Gair, USVI recovery program principal for Witt O'Brien's. "Our mission is to help the Virgin Islands to accelerate recovery and to build back stronger. The best way to achieve that is by combining the best and the brightest island professionals with the recovery expertise our firm has nationwide."

Witt O'Brien's recovery expert, Norberto Dueñas, joined the USVI recovery team within a few months of retiring as the City Manager of San Jose, Ca., America's tenth largest city, bringing with him hands-on experience managing large capital improvement programs. He said, "I'm excited to be supporting the USVI CDBG-DR program and look forward to working with the BDO USVI team to train and transition more recovery program roles to local staff over the next year."

The PMO duties will include collecting and analyzing data related to federally funded disaster-recovery projects across government agencies and instrumentalities in order to ensure projects start and end on time, and remain within pre-determined budgets.

John Engerman, Governor Albert Bryan's campaign manager, said he is a partner of BDO VI. Here's the official statement from the company on Mr. Engerman's involvement: "BDO USVI has been providing the Virgin Islands community with consulting and professional services since 2014. Mr. Engerman has built a strong reputation as an astute businessman that serves his clients with integrity and one who avidly gives back to the community. While Mr. Engerman volunteered to serve as Governor Bryan's territorial campaign manager in the recent elections, he has not joined the Bryan Administration and remains a private citizen, operating a private business that provides excellent employment opportunities for Virgin Islanders. Witt O'Brien's partnership with BDO USVI is a testament to BDO's ability to handle the complex tracking and reporting matters surrounding the USVI's long-term recovery."

Feature Image: An aerial view of St. Thomas following Hurricane Irma. Courtesy [Reemy-Reemz Photography](#).