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Hurricane Irma Devastated St. Thomas and St. John 3 Years Ago

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Third-year anniversary collage of Hurricane Irma By. VI CONSORTIUM/REEMY-REEMZ PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEOGRAPHY, WEATHER CHANNEL

St. Croix was unscathed. Residents of the Big Island, as it is called, had braced for impact as projections were certain the U.S. Virgin Islands would be whiplashed by Hurricane Irma. But well into the afternoon, things were eerily calm. It had hardly rained and the wind... well, there was almost no wind in many parts of the island.

The story on sister islands St. Thomas and St. John was entirely different. News started pouring in during the evening time that St. Thomas had sustained catastrophic damage. Our initial story, published during the early evening of Sept. 6, 2017, gave only a glimpse of the vast damage

Hurricane Irma of 2017 had exacted on St. Thomas.

And in St. John the damage was worse, with access to Love City, as St. John is affectionately called, cut off.

Below, some paragraphs of our original Hurricane Irma article on St. Thomas, titled, "[Hurricane Irma Wreaks Havoc on St. Thomas](#)":

“Hurricane Irma, hours after exacting catastrophic damage on St. Martin and Anguilla, made its way to St. Thomas during the late morning time of Wednesday, commencing what would be hours of pounding with lots of rain and hurricane-force winds, leaving many parts of the second largest of the U.S. Virgin Islands in shambles, with dozens of persons reporting destroyed roofs, flooding, collapsed homes and more.”

“The Schneider Regional Medical Center’s (S.R.M.C.) roof was destroyed, according to a trusted government source, who was not sanctioned to speak officially. The government’s Emergency Operation Command, a group recently created to lead Hurricane Irma emergency response, said the hospital relocated all patients from the third and fourth floors to the second floor due to flooding caused by roof damage.”

“Samuel Topp, Government House’s deputy communications director, told The Consortium Wednesday night that the entire hospital had been compromised. “One hospital official described the hospital as representing catastrophic failure,” Mr. Topp said. He said planning and logistics were underway to evacuate the patient population at Schneider Hospital to a United States Military ship. “That has not been finalized and that is being contemplated as we speak,” Mr. Topp said.”

Here are some excerpts from our Hurricane Irma story on St. John, titled in part, "[St. John Suffered 'Much More Damage' Than St. Thomas, Governor Mapp Says](#)":

The account for the first day following Irma’s landfall to the USVI, was that St. Thomas had sustained the most extreme damage, a narrative that emerged because it was near impossible to know what had happened to St. John as communication lines were compromised. But as more information came available and pictures started to appear online, it was clear that St. John had suffered as much damage — if not more — than St. Thomas.

Governor Mapp confirmed it to be more.

“As we went over to St. John I couldn’t imagine, after looking at the destruction in St. Thomas, that it could be worse. But the folks on St. John suffered more. More horrific damage, much more explosive natures of their homes,” Mr. Mapp said.

The ravaged state of the islands overwhelmed the governor, compelling him to ask for five minutes alone. But Mr. Mapp was re-energized, he said, after witnessing the resolve of Hurricane victims, who he said were eager to help with recovery efforts even after being so adversely impacted by the storm.

“You saw some folks whose roof was gone, sitting on their porch... and as we did the fly-overs, a number of people got out and waved. In one incident, some folks were waving the American flag, just happy to see that within 48 hours the governments of their country is responding to such a dire event,” Mr. Mapp said.

What followed after Hurricane Irma walloped the two islands demonstrated territory-wide unity. St. Croix, spared by the storm, saw its residents banding together to provide overwhelming support to the sister islands. From generators, to ice, water, canned goods — and anything that could help — residents of the Big Island came through. Items went over by boat and plane. Residents who owned speed boats — understanding the urgency and destitution the storm had caused to many on the islands — used them to ferry over goods. From big and small businesses to families and individuals, the entire community pitched in to help.

That help, of course, was short-lived, as two weeks later, [Hurricane Maria slammed St. Croix](#). Together, the two storms left the entire USVI without power for months.

On the good side, the disasters also saw a strong FEMA presence and support which continues today. From emergency home repair efforts to providing rent funding for at least a year to displaced Virgin Islanders, the indelible role of the federal government to the USVI came in clear view.

Three years later and the USVI has made great strides in recovery. Schools territory-wide damaged and rendered unusable are [beginning the process](#) of demolition and rebuild; the Juan F. Luis Hospital [has been approved for rebuild](#); and a plethora of other FEMA-funded efforts as a result of the damage caused by the storms are seeing progress.

Even so, residents keep a wary eye on the tropical Atlantic, which is [now in its busiest phase](#) of the 2020 Hurricane Season.