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Fire 'Completed Destroyed' Fort Mylner Shopping Center, Fire Director Says

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Aerial shot of the fire that destroyed Fort Mylner By. VIRGIN ISLANDS DRONE SERVICES

ST. THOMAS — St. Thomas residents and natives of the island living abroad mourned the destruction by fire of the decades-old Fort Mylner Shopping Center, which was consumed by fire overnight Sunday and into the wee hours of Monday morning. Fire Director Daryl George Sr. told the Consortium this afternoon that the shopping center — a source of fond memories for many St. Thomians — was "completely destroyed."

Firefighters were alerted of the blaze at about 12:06 a.m. Monday and made it to the scene within three minutes. The first unit to arrive came with seven firefighters. At that time, the fire, Mr.

George said, was already spreading in the roof. A second unit also with seven men rushed to the scene, followed by two additional units thereafter for a total of 22 firefighters.

Mr. George said firefighters encountered some problems with the water hydrant and had to call on private water haulers for assistance. The hydrant, he said, collapsed several times until WAPA came to provide support.

"After we got the water situation solved, the guys made an initially attack and the fire was contained after it ran through the mall," Mr. George said.

The fire chief said nine firefighting pieces of equipment were used to help put out the blaze. And he praised the firemen for doing "an awesome job," stating that because of the structure's old age and its wooden roof, the fire tore through the entire building mercilessly.

"They did the best they could because this building is an older building and it doesn't have fire walls," the fire chief said. "That means the fire cannot be contained; it keeps spreading. The roof was wooden and it spread very quickly."

Mr. George said as of 3:15 this afternoon the fire was still being contained, and investigators were not cleared to enter. The fire chief did say that firefighters had an idea relative to where the fire started.

Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach, who visited the destroyed facility today, expressed dismay at the building's demise and shared heartfelt sympathies with the business owners who in a moment lost their livelihoods.

"Fort Mylner has been a vital element in our East End business community for as long as I can remember, going back to my childhood days. It is surreal to witness the destruction of the entire property from one end to the other, and to feel the impact on business owners, some of whom have been in business at Fort Mylner for decades, and for others just a few months," he said.

He added, "This incident is a tragic loss that has impacted the lives of so many small business owners and employees who are already battling the ongoing effects of COVID-19 on their businesses. I am saddened by the devastation caused by the fire and express my heartfelt support to those employees and owners who will experience an interruption in their livelihood. We must support them in the challenge to rebuild their businesses, and reconstruct the complex.

"I would like to publicly thank our courageous firefighters who have been on the scene to combat the fire since the wee hours of the morning, the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority for its assistance with water supply in the area, and all other agencies who responded and assisted to salvage the situation. The efforts of all involved are commended and we thank you for your service."