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Welcome to the New and Improved Virgin Islands Consortium. A Lot Has Changed Since the Last Time You Were Here.

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VI Consortium Founder and Publisher, Ernice Gilbert, unveils the redesigned VIC website during an event at the Divi Casino in September. By. Kareem Alexander for VI Consortium

We are proud to announce to our dedicated readers that today begins an exciting, new chapter for the VI Consortium.

As you can see, the redesigned Consortium, which launched at 5:50 on Tuesday Nov. 12, is an easier to navigate, easier to read platform. It provides a new source for Caribbean-wide news. And with developing resources, we are turning greater attention to giving you

more news and information from the St. Thomas and St. John districts.

"It is an exciting time," said founder and Publisher Ernice Gilbert. "It is a brand new and redesigned platform that fits with my vision of providing a product that represents the U.S. Virgin Islands, and now the wider Caribbean, well."

Inside these pages you will find the same hard-hitting coverage of important Virgin Islands issues. We will continue to be an outlet for Virgin Islanders to promote their art, their businesses, events and service to the community. A new St. Thomas-St. John Bureau will be staffed-up and running. Our commitment to the territory will grow with partnerships with local businesses, community organizations and public entities, here in the Virgin Islands and beyond our borders.

For big business, advertising may cost a little more, but it comes with innovative changes in the way promotional products are produced. For small business, the options are expanding, as the Consortium creates singular event "Hubs" for communities throughout the territory.

On St. Thomas, Red Hook and the Waterfront, Havensight and Tutu "Hubs" will be the go-to place for readers interested in what's going on in those neighborhoods.

Please take a moment to read today's story on navigating the new site to learn more about exploring every nook and cranny the Consortium now offers.

A Long Road

The Consortium has been a journey, one that began five years ago with a cellphone, a laptop and Ernice Gilbert's long-shot dream of creating an online publication that covers the Virgin Islands like no other news organization in the territory.

By the summer of 2014, Mr. Gilbert had already shown a deep concern with what happens in the Virgin Islands community. He had already been co-owner of a small St. Croix Christian radio station, where he hosted a political program called The Virgin Islands Political Consortium (VIPC). Before that Mr. Gilbert was a journalist for seven years in the multi-billion dollar video games industry, and founder of a games news website, Games Thirst, with writers spanning the globe -- from Europe to North America. The VIPC is now a Consortium live interview show. During the radio days, he interviewed all gubernatorial candidates in the 2014 general election. One day following an interview, Mr. Gilbert thought about his dedication to the territory, his experience as a journalist and ability to create websites. "Why don't I create a platform that is immediately, accurate and a platform that takes advantage of social media," Mr. Gilbert said he thought to himself at the time.

In a territory where news and information was largely spread by radio programs, printed newspapers and a small number of online news sites, the Consortium aimed to create a news product until then missing in the territory. "Something that was exciting; something that was different," said Mr. Gilbert.

The Consortium came out of the gate on August 2, 2014 with hard-hitting coverage of the politics and breaking news of the day. When it launched, the Virgin Islands was in the

final throes of an election year that saw Kenneth Mapp elected and some of the highest profile news stories in recent memory come to light -- among them the highly publicized [morale turpitude stories](#) that animated the 2014 election cycle.

"We covered those news stories so heavily. We developed news sources who were sending information our way. The Consortium became that online platform that you went to during that time," said Mr. Gilbert. "We grew from there."

Five years, two catastrophic hurricanes, two governors, and hundreds of power outages later, the Consortium has accomplished much of what we set out to do.

Getting to this point was not easy, financially, or otherwise. In the beginning, Mr. Gilbert worked from his apartment. There was one part-time staffer to help. But as a fledgling business, few advertisers were willing to take a risk.

However, as the platform continued to deliver hard-hitting news coverage incessantly, about a year in, advertisers started taking notice. The platform has seen many of its stories cause change in the local government, its departments and agencies; it has watched as its stories caused [the federal government to take action against corruption](#); and as the community rally around a number of causes based on important stories VIC published. The Consortium has been the trendsetter in online news coverage and delivery, and was the first to start producing live-streaming on Facebook after investing heavily in emerging technologies that made live-streaming on the ubiquitous platform easy to use and yet professional. Relative to the territory's carnivals and festivals, the Consortium has taken coverage to new heights, providing an endless stream of videos, pictures and live-streaming that no other media platform in the territory has even attempted to emulate.

Mr. Gilbert became a household name for his tough interviews with the territory's leaders. But he became ubiquitous following the 2017 hurricanes, as he essentially served as a voice of the people during the nightly press conferences during the Mapp administration following the disasters -- seeking answers to pertinent questions.

It was also a difficult time for the platform. Internet was patchy, yet VI Consortium provided daily updates to the community and VI diaspora -- with Mr. Gilbert using his AT&T internet mobile device -- which only worked at odd times, either late at nights or really early in the mornings -- to publish articles. Sometimes he would stay at Government House on St. Croix until midnight to make sure Virgin Islanders were updated with important information, as Government House was one of the first places to be restored with internet service.

Mr. Gilbert, for the months following the storms, made his life about ensuring the territory was properly covered. He traveled back and forth between islands on speed boats providing coverage that was viewed by millions in videos and written stories combined. During that time, sleep and eating properly was an afterthought, Mr. Gilbert said, causing the VIC founder to fall ill a number of times. "I would go to the press conferences at 7 p.m. and leave after midnight at times -- sometimes after coming from St. Thomas and St. John providing coverage -- because I knew tens of thousands of people depended on VI Consortium for information," he said.

The daily inundation of traffic would cause the VI Consortium website to crash often. This accelerated the platform's move to dedicated servers to solve the problem.

"My desire has always been to serve as a voice, and force, on behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands. The foundation of VI Consortium is to be a platform that holds leaders to account, and one that [seeks justice on behalf of the voiceless](#). I love the Washington Post's tagline: "Democracy Dies in Darkness," Mr. Gilbert said.

In the coming years, Mr. Gilbert sees the Consortium growing further and faster. "The intention in the next five years is for the Consortium to become a brand that is synonymous with the Caribbean. Its main function will continue to be the foundational service of keeping the people informed of the news happening in their local and regional.

"Our goal is that the Consortium platform becomes the mainstay, and the go-to for Virgin Islands and Caribbean breaking news, in-depth stories, culture, carnivals, festivals."

The Consortium may not be the only local news site you visit on a daily basis. But chances are, we are the first and the last you read each day. We hope that our loyal readership continues to turn to us for news and information vital to move the territory forward.