

logo not found or type unknown

Five Shot, One Dead in St. Thomas Near Four Winds Plaza as Gun Violence Persists in USVI; Victim Identified

Crime / **Published On October 24, 2020 07:08 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **October 24, 2020**

Image not found or type unknown



Scene of Four Winds Plaza Shooting which took place on Sat. Oct. 24, 2020 By. VI CONSORTIUM

Last updated on Saturday, Oct. 24 at 11:51 a.m.

ST. THOMAS — Five people were shot early Saturday in St. Thomas near the Four Winds Plaza Shopping Center, the V.I. Police Department has confirmed to the Consortium. Of the five, one victim succumbed to his wounds, carrying the territory's homicide count in 2020 to 43.

Police responded to the incident at about 4:37 a.m., according to V.I.P.D. Public Information Officer Toby Derima. The Medical Examiner was still on the scene after 8:00 a.m. collecting the deceased victim's body. The V.I.P.D. also [announced the incident on Twitter](#) this morning.

According to Mr. Derima, the four other victims were at the Schneider Regional Medical Center receiving care. It was not yet determined the seriousness of the injured victims' wounds.

The deceased victim was identified by next of kin as 29-year-old Joseph Andrews.

A week earlier, the territory's 42nd homicide occurred on St. Croix in Williams Delight, when a 28-year-old man named Olson Tyson [was shot to death](#) during the night of Oct. 16.

Governor Albert Bryan recently appealed to the community to help law enforcement in bringing criminals to justice. "We have to stand as one people to establish wrong from right and discontinue our silent overlooking of wrong that happens in our community," said the governor [during his Covid-19 response update on Oct. 13](#). "Whether it's an illegal horse track, drag racing, prostitution, loitering in places where you don't belong, the illegal numbers game and the gambling houses, trespassing — all these things we have to say no more to as a community."

During a Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, Public Safety and Veterans Affairs hearing on Oct. 16, legislators received testimony from V.I.P.D. Commissioner Trevor Velinor relative to the increase in gun violence and V.I.P.D. efforts to confront the problem.

Mr. Velinor told the committee that the police force has been tactically combating gun violence with help from both federal and local partners. "The V.I.P.D. considers the territory's gun offenses very seriously and will continue to collaborate with our federal and local partners alike to yield arrests and prosecute these cases aggressively," said Mr. Velinor.

The V.I.P.D. has partnered with the V.I. Port Authority and the Department of Tourism to introduce a firearms substation at both the Cyril E. King and the Henry E. Rohlsen airports. "Our experience confirms that firearms are secreted within luggage and then brought into the territory, ending up on our streets to commit acts of violence," said the police commissioner. "V.I.P.D. will continue to work with U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, ATF, and other federal agencies to interdict these firearms before they can get on our streets." Mr. Velinor said these substations are scheduled to open within the next few weeks.

Along with the firearms substation at the airports, with the help of 911, the V.I.P.D. utilizes an application software called "ShotSpotter" to assist with reporting a firearm complaint. The ShotSpotter software utilizes a series of microphones that are placed in strategic locations around the territory. The microphones listen for the distinctive sound of gunshots, then precisely and swiftly determines the shooting location, the number of shots fired, and possibly the type of firearms (machine gun or semi-automatic). In less than a minute, police officers and 911 dispatchers are notified of the gunfire incidents, even if no one calls 911.

Mr. Velinor said ShotSpotter has allowed the police department to rapidly deploy police personnel to areas upon receiving the alert, and it also provides officers with as much real-time information as possible when responding to the gunfire, the commissioner said.

However, despite the V.I.P.D.'s initiatives to curtail crime, homicides have risen 29 percent compared to 2019, the commissioner made known during the hearing. As of Friday, the V.I.P.D. had made 14 arrests related to 9 of the 41 homicides.

Committee chairman Steven Payne expressed frustration with the rising crime even as the police department continues to receive help from federal partners. "I am concerned because despite the federal and local partnerships, there is a rise in crime in comparison to last year when people were free to traverse," said Mr. Payne, emphasizing that even though the territory is under a state of emergency due to Covid-19 and even as mass gatherings are prohibited, gun violence remains pervasive. "There needs to be more police presence in areas where shots are constantly fired," he said.

Agreeing with Mr. Payne's sentiments, Senator Myron Jackson, an avid advocate for combating gun violence, asked, "What is the cost of 40 lives to gun violence to this territory? Can you put a dollar value on that for me?" Mr. Velinor responded, "No, I cannot place a value on a life." Mr. Jackson told the commissioner that there were over 1,000 families in the territory who deserve an explanation and closure for the sudden and violent loss of their loved ones, and that there is a dire need for a comprehensive approach to reducing gun violence.

"We have some public safety challenges in our territory. It didn't start in 2020, and it didn't start in 2019. We saw the trajectory, and we can do something about it. We are in this fight together—the legislative and executive branches of government, the community, and certainly, the dedicated men and women of the Virgin Islands Police Department," said Mr. Velinor.