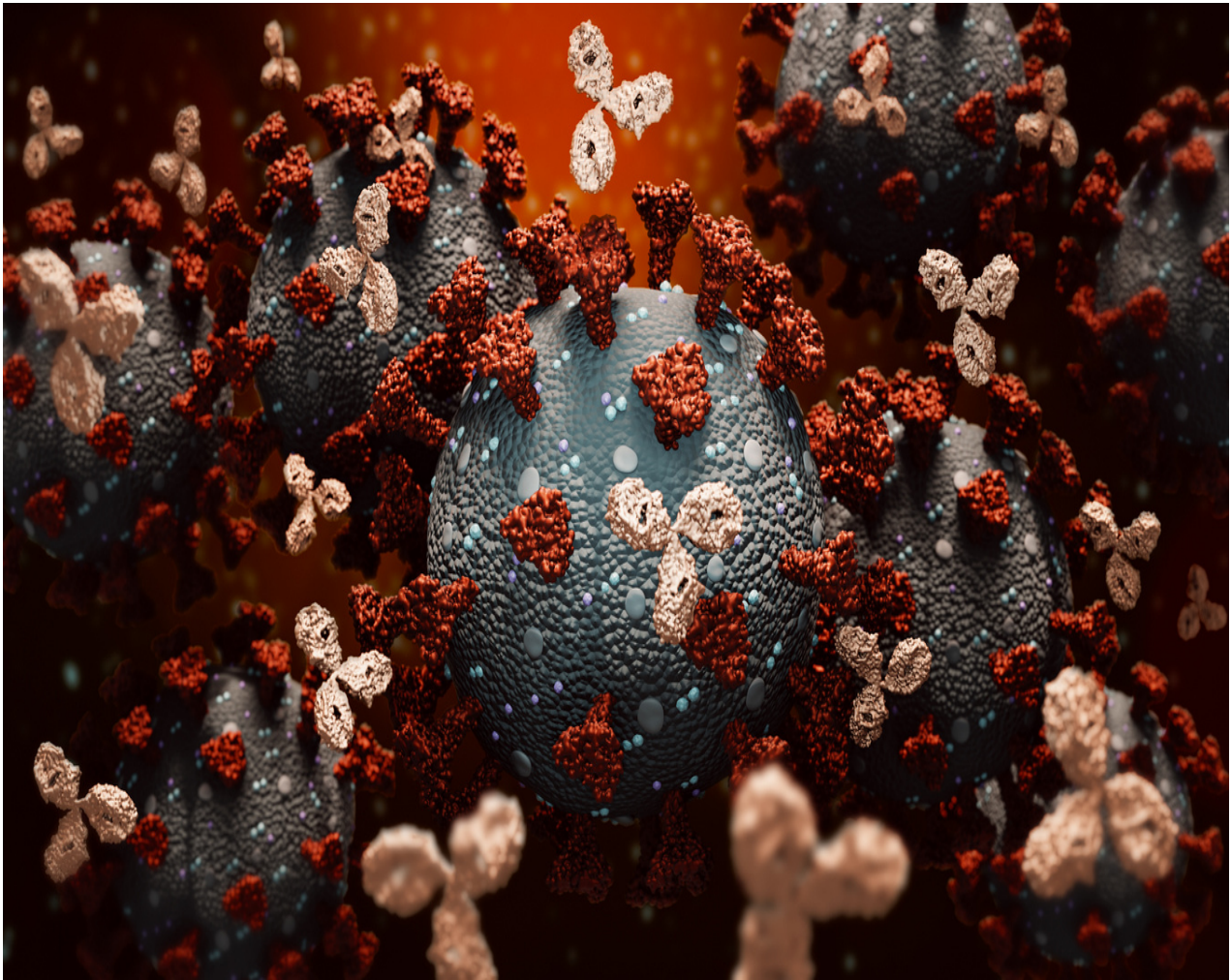


The Virgin Islands Consortium

This Was 2020: The Coronavirus Upended Our Lives, and Things Will Never be The Same

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While there are other significant things that occurred in the year 2020, which we will list before getting into the life-changing and upending events that came as a result of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19), there is little argument that the pandemic, which first started in China, has altered the way we live not only in the USVI, but around the world forever.

Before we get into it, here are the other significant items of 2020:

Gun Violence and Homicides Rocked the Territory...Again

As of Thursday, the territory had recorded 47 homicides since January, a staggeringly high number that the V.I.P.D. has tried to address but has [struggled to contain](#). The latest homicide occurred [this week on St. Croix](#).

V.I.P.D. Commissioner Trevor Velinor held a number of press conferences throughout the months of 2020, where community members were urged to provide information. Yet residents remain wary of divulging details they may have relative to criminal activity, fearing for their safety.

We Dodged the Hyperactive 2020 Hurricane Season

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, [the extremely active](#) 2020 Atlantic hurricane season came with a record-breaking 30 named storms and 12 landfalling storms in the continental United States. Thankfully, the territory, which in 2017 was battered by Hurricanes Irma and Maria, was spared direct impact by any major storm this year, and that is significant.

2020 Election Leads to Big Changes in Senate

The 2020 election saw a number of 33rd Legislature senators being voted out, while some decided not to seek reelection. On St. Croix, Alicia Barnes did not seek reelection, while Allison DeGazon was voted out. Also voted out was Senator Oakland Benta on St. Croix.

On St. Thomas, Senator Myron Jackson did not seek reelection, while Senators Stedmann Hodge, Jr. and Athneil Thomas were voted out. In all, the 34th Legislature will include [six new members to the body](#).

\$1 Million Avera Deal With Dept. of Health Turns Into Scandal

The Dept. of Health had planned on providing Avera, a fledgling company owned in part of Governor Albert Bryan's daughter, [a \\$1 million contract to provide Covid-19 contact tracing work](#), a field the company had no experience in. However, after the conflict of interest issue was brought to light by Senator Kurt Vialet during a Senate hearing, and heavy coverage on VI Consortium and other media houses, the deal fizzled, and the contract was later awarded to [a firm reputable](#) in the important work of contact tracing.

This Was 2020: The Coronavirus Upended Our Lives, and Things Will Never be The Same

The *Novel Coronavirus of 2019* seemed to be a problem in a far away world in December 2019. News networks such as CNN showed China scrambling to contain an outbreak of a little known virus at the time, in Wuhan, a major China city. The country would then build a hospital in a matter of days as deaths continued to grow and hospitals became inundated with patients.

Far, far away, the problem looked from America — and the USVI — with American leaders vowing to take protective measures to safeguard its citizens. Yet in a matter of months, the first case of the virus appeared in America, and by March, states and territories were ordering lockdowns that humbled the American economy, made roughly 14 million workers redundant, and changed forever the way we live our lives.

The First Shutdown

On [March 19](#), Governor Bryan limited gatherings to 10 persons, as Covid-19 cases in the territory started to grow. A few days later, on March 22, the governor [took bolder steps](#), halting non-essential travel to the USVI while encouraging residents to "shelter in place." Those decisions led to a cascading of what was considered normal life to a new reality: working, learning, shopping, playing, entertaining — and doing almost everything from home.

A Virtual Life: School

On April 18, Mr. Bryan [announced the cancelation of in-person learning](#), following trends on the U.S. mainland as Covid-19 cases grew rapidly. Almost everything related to education had been moved to virtual, including graduation ceremonies. To this day, learning for public schools in the territory remains a virtual effort, with [some in-person learning expected to resume next year](#).

The move to virtual learning led to innovations that would have otherwise taken years to fully implement. Zoom made virtual meetups easy, and the Dept. of Education, working with Media One, a video production and livestreaming company, produced exceptional graduation ceremonies.

A Virtual Life: Entertainment

With the territory's carnival and festivals canceled, the Division of Festivals turned to virtual events, beginning with the St. Thomas Carnival (VI Carnival), to provide some entertainment for residents disappointed by the cancelations. The Consortium held the first virtual concert, which featured Big Band out of St. Croix, and the event remains the most watched and most commented-on virtual affair for 2020. The event [garnered 332,000 views and 165,000 comments](#).

A Virtual Life: Shopping

Many Virgin Islanders who had done only limited shopping online expanded their web purchases as Covid-19 restrictions depressed travel. The territory's Post Offices were receiving more mail than they had ever handled during non-holiday months, according to Postal Service Officials.

A Virtual Life: Meetings

Virtual meetings was a no-brainer as homebound Virgin Islanders sought to not only conduct meetings, but stay connected with loved ones.

The year 2020 also saw a number of business closures because of the pandemic. But as with such events, there were winners and losers, and online businesses saw gains as people took a great portion of their commerce activity online.

With vaccines now developed for Covid-19, life will eventually go back to some semblance of normalcy in 2022 (yes, 2022). However, some behaviors adopted during

the pandemic, while they may diminish in size, will never be abandoned.

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