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## Community Activist Raises \$14,000 For VIPD Canine Core to Buy Dog, \$11,000 for Travel, Housing and Elite Canine Training on U.S. Mainland

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**From left, McGarvey “Darren” Henry, Bon Manjer head Diane Christian, Ricky Messer and his daughter Aliya Messer at the Bon Manjer Restaurant on Thursday, April 1, 2021. By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM**

The V.I.P.D.'s Canine Core in the St. Croix District will get a new dog and receive elite canine training in St. Louis, Missouri for eight days beginning this weekend following the selfless effort of a known community activist, Ricky Messer, who overtime used his influence and links with major players to secure total funding of more than \$25,000 to accomplish the goal.

During a brief check unveiling ceremony at the Bon Manjer Restaurant & Ultra Lounge in Sion Farm Thursday, Mr. Messer said the owner of the restaurant as well as V.I. Industrial Services, McGarvey “Darren” Henry, provided the funding, \$14,295 for the canine dog. He also said \$11,000 was provided by a number of V.I. businesses, among them Plaza Extra East, Dr. Anthony Ricketts, MD, Empire Gas Station and the Dept. of Tourism. The funds will pay for five canine handlers, hotel and registration fees for the training.

"This is a dream of mine come true," Mr. Messer said at the ceremony. He said he had spoken to a former police chief about the need for a canine dog and training for the dog's handlers, and brought the conversation up again with new Deputy Police Chief Sean Santos Sr. Mr. Messer then approached Mr. Henry about supporting the effort. "He said sure, and as a result of this, we have a check we're donating to the V.I.P.D. from V.I. Industrial Services... and Bon Manjer here," Mr. Messer said.

V.I.P.D. Deputy Commissioner of Operations, Calvin Walwyn, expressed gratitude to Mr. Messer and Mr. Henry on behalf of the police force. "Crime prevention is everybody's business; the Virgin Islands Police Department cannot do it alone," Mr. Walwyn said. "We try but it simply does not work unless we have community involvement. I am very happy today, I am very proud to be the recipient of community support. It is not the money, it's the fact that a small, local business has taken the decision to assist the V.I.P.D. in helping to reduce violent crime in the territory."

He later added, "We are praying that this will be the beginning of local businesses coming to the aid of the V.I.P.D. in helping to make sure that all businesses in the community have a hand in helping the V.I.P.D. continue the reduction of violent crime."

Deputy Chief Santos also expressed gratitude and expounded on the role of the Canine Core. He said it was established in August, 1979 and the community throughout the years has supported the core with equipment and dog purchases.

He said the canine dogs are integral to the work of sniffing out clues during crime investigations, as well as being patrol assistants during apprehension initiatives.

The dogs are also used for detecting the smell of currency, narcotics, firearms and explosives. "What we do is we utilize these dogs to help us as a tool in finding these items that can become contraband," Dep. Chief Santos said.

Mr. Messer told the Consortium that his love for St. Croix and the territory is what drives him to continue giving back. In November 2019, he [aligned a group of men and secured assistance from the V.I. Fire Service](#) to clean King Street, Christiansted — an effort that [went viral](#) as the community expressed gratitude.

"This is home," Mr. Messer said, referring to St. Croix. "I work for lawyers and I think that we have a serious problem when it comes to crime, and I truly think that V.I.P.D., once given the tools to operate, they can do a good job."

"Let's face it, we had a bank robbery, a high-speed chase and a man running into the bushes. We don't have no dog to chase him," Mr. Messer added. Of the officers, he said, "We have a good group of people but they just don't have the tools."

