

The Virgin Islands Consortium

11-Year-Old Girl Child Among Those Shot Monday Night; Police Vow Arrests and Justice 'in Short Order'

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Police on Tuesday morning continued their investigation into a shooting incident that occurred the night before at the Cash & Carry store. By. VI CONSORTIUM

ST. CROIX - An 11-year-old child residing in the Aureo Diaz Heights housing community was injured by gunfire Monday night after bullets from a shooting at the community struck her while playing at a playground, law enforcement officials said during a Tuesday morning press briefing called to address multiple shootings. She was one of four people injured last night during that incident, two of whom succumbed to injuries sustained during the shootout. They were pronounced dead at the Juan F. Luis Hospital.

Two hours later, a shooting at the Cash & Carry store in Estate La Reine resulted in the death of one man, while another was injured.

The victims of the Aureo Diaz shootings were identified as Michael Ramos, 33 of Estate Mountain, who was shot in his upper and lower body, and Juan Velasquez, 38 of Aureo Diaz Heights, who was shot multiple times in the upper body. The victim of the Estate La Reine incident was identified as Jovel Newton and was pronounced dead on the scene.

Police Commissioner Trevor Velinor said Homeland Security Investigations, the Drug Enforcement Agency and V.I.P.D. officers responded to the La Reine incident. He said federal agents who were part of the response were also VIPD law enforcement officers deputized as federal agents of HSI and the DEA. These officers also work with the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area initiative (HIDTA) and receive selfsame training as other federal law enforcement personnel.

"This has been happening for a couple decades here in the territory. We, the Virgin Islands Police Department have partnered with our federal partners and as a result we are able to have local VIPD personnel who are deputized as federal agents. They receive the same training and participate in investigations as any other federal law enforcement officer," Mr. Velinor said.

During the press briefing, Mr. Velinor and St. Croix Chief of Police Sidney Elskoe addressed the shootings and expressed confidence that swift justice would be served in both incidents. "These matters continue to be under investigation, and as the commissioner said, we look forward to seeing them resolved in short order." The V.I.P.D. said the community had provided tips and that all leads were being followed.

Police officers found multiple firearms on the scene, though Chief Elskoe refused to divulge the type of weapons recovered. He said the motive behind the Aureo Diaz Heights shooting appeared to be the result of an argument, while the Estate La Reine incident was being investigated.

Mr. Velinor, in responding to a Consortium question, said the installation of cameras throughout the territory was on schedule for July 27 of this year. The commissioner said he was not certain whether installation would take place simultaneously in both districts, or one district at a time. "That process has started; I will just will have to get back with you on that," he said.

The police commissioner has hailed the ShotSpotter system as effective in the department's overall effort to battle criminal activity. On Tuesday, he said the system has worked in showing community members that officers respond to incident faster. He also said ShotSpotter has led to arrests.

Asked whether he would commit to the community that because of the initiatives implemented under his tenure, a reduction in crime would be realized by the end of 2021. The commissioner did not commit to the challenge, but spoke to a multi-prong effort of implementing technology — cameras, ShotSpotter — along with the involvement of the community, that would lead to less criminal activity.

"Those all play a role and police is a very critical part of that. So this is not solely a policing issue, this is also a community issue," Mr. Velinor said.

The Monday night homicides carried St. Croix's total to fifteen, followed by St. Thomas with two, and St. John one for a total of eighteen homicides for 2021.

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