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MASA Assist Cuts Ribbon on Shiny, New St. Thomas Headquarters

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ST. THOMAS — MASA Assist, the worldwide air ambulance company with offices throughout the Caribbean, got the blend of homecoming and ribbon cutting just right on Wednesday.

With more than a dozen old friends and coworkers on board, MASA Assist, a worldwide air ambulance and medical transport company, celebrated the opening of its splashy, new Virgin Islands headquarters in the Guardian Building in St. Thomas' Havensight district (across from the Havensight Mall entrance). The company provides insurance services guaranteeing customers medical transportation in and out of the Virgin Islands

Brightly lit and crisply outfitted with new office furnishings, the complex of work-space and conference areas underwent a 10-week storm reconstruction before staff could occupy the building, said Janet Bryant, the USVI vice president of sales and operations. She likes to consider the new digs “a statement piece. ... We’ve been here (on St. Thomas) for 28 years. We’ll like this to be our home for another 42.”

The new Havensight location had been a travel industry office before the winds and water of Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

Despite the post-storm challenges of the territory’s hospitals and the dearth of some health care specialists, Director of International Operations Janelle Ennis said the company saw only marginal increases in claims in the years since.

There have been several hundred flights off the territory this year, but not all critical airlifts. Among the most common services provided:

- Emergency medical flights coordinated with its partner, Reva Air Ambulance and Medical Flights out of Puerto Rico. These are typically the fully staffed private flights originating at a territory hospital and landing in Puerto Rico, Florida or virtually any other region of the U.S.
- Paramedic Assist flights whereby MASA provides for round-trip, flight-class commercial airline flight for the patient, who is accompanied by a paramedic. A St. Croix customer, for example, suffered from gall stones a month ago. Her doctor was off-island. “She can’t wait that long to have that surgery,” said Ms. Bryant. “So we did a paramedic assist flight. We put a paramedic on the flight with her. She didn’t need an air ambulance, so we fly her to make sure that she gets the surgery, and then we flew her back home.”
- “We take you home.” Many of us in the Caribbean will spend our final days away from our island of birth. Mortal remains flights will ensure that MASA returns an individual home after passing. There has been at least 26 such flights this year, Ms. Bryant said.

MASA is a primary insurer, meaning the company pays the transportation costs. “Other air ambulances can be a secondary insurer. They are going to look to your insurance company, which might say we will take you to the nearest location. Say Puerto Rico,” Ms. Bryant said.

“With a MASA plan, you go to Puerto Rico, Miami or you can choose a zone across the United States. When you have a medical emergency, that is where MASA is going to take you,” Ms. Bryant said.

Other services provided, according to the MASA Assist website: