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'It Was a Good Run': Limetree Bay Employees Work Last Day at Shuttered Refinery

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A Limetree Bay Refinery employee, who worked his last day at the company on Friday, Sept. 17, 2021, told the Consortium he would move to the U.S. mainland. By. ERNICE GILBERT/VI CONSORTIUM

ST. CROIX — The bulk of the 271 Limetree Bay Refinery employees the company said it would layoff by the weekend were released Friday, as the refinery goes into an indefinite shutdown with its future [hanging in the balance](#).

The Consortium spoke with about a dozen employees laid off today as they made their way out the main office building, into their vehicles and out the gate. Some were operators, others worked in maintenance and other fields.

George Innocent was among those made redundant today. The native Virgin Islander has lived in Texas for many years and plans on moving back to the states in the coming weeks. He told the Consortium that he became emotional about the situation on Thursday, thinking of how the loss of jobs would impact individuals. "Some people invested in homes, land, they took out loans believing that they would be employed at the refinery for years," Mr. Innocent said.

As he spoke, another laid off employee who was driving out the parking lot stated, "It was a good run." Mr. Innocent responded in the affirmative.

A female employee expressed regret about the layoffs, but said she would remain in the territory because she had recently returned from the U.S. mainland. She also spoke of her online business selling cosmetics that had taken off. Other laid off employees, however, spoke of moving to the states if opportunities on St. Croix were scant.

Their sentiments served as a microcosm of the thinking of individuals whose livelihoods have been improved because of their employment at the now-shuttered refinery. The consensus is they will do what they must to maintain their standard of living — even if it means leaving the island they love.

In a statement issued Friday, Limetree Bay CEO Jeff Rinker said, "It is a sad day today as we say goodbye to the dedicated men and women who worked so hard to restart the refinery. Restarting the refinery after being idled for almost a decade was a tremendous challenge that this team approached with professionalism and energy; while the outcome was not as we had hoped or intended, I remain deeply grateful for their efforts and we remain hopeful that the refinery will restart at some future date under new ownership." Limetree Bay said Friday it continues to work with its advisors "to review potential strategic alternatives for the refinery."

The economic impact from what was once the territory's largest employer is already being felt both in the central government, on local businesses and on individual lives. The Bryan administration's touting of a \$71 million budget surplus [can no longer be boasted](#) in part due to the refinery's closure along with the spend of \$45 million to \$50 million on gov't employees based on a promise to repay the 8 percent salary reduction. Additionally, the Bryan administration had to include \$30 million in federal funds from the American Rescue Plan as an offset to meet budget projections. All considered, the government found itself in a deficit — \$20 million from refinery projections and the inclusion of \$30 million from Covid dollars to meet budget demands — of \$50 million.

A recent survey conducted by the Office of Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett brought into focus the sharp negative impact on the economy the closure of Limetree Bay Refining has had. Virtually all business owners who participated in the survey, seen [here](#), said the closure had a negative impact on their operation in one form or another.

These business owners, some directly tied to Limetree Bay Refining, reported less traffic, loss of students (hinting at a learning institution), drop in marine services and less traffic at food establishments, among others.

"Our business supported and supplied a company that had a contract with the refinery," wrote one respondent. "The company needed logistical support building and maintaining a supply chain, together with local warehousing and delivery support. The closure has led to a significant decrease in sales and an excess of pre-purchased inventory with significant value. This equates to reduced Gross Receipts Taxes paid and a reduction in labor further impacting the community. We will struggle to deplete this inventory and will take a loss which could lead to further labor reductions."

During a Senate hearing earlier this year, Allison DeGazon, Division of Economic Research director, told Senator Kurt Vialet that the Limetree Bay operations, including the terminal and refinery, accounted for 15 percent of the territory's gross domestic product, or \$610 million. There were other sources of revenue directly tied to the south shore facility, including a \$14 million concession fee from the refinery. All considered, Limetree Bay's impact on GDP was over \$800 million, Ms. DeGazon said.

Governor Albert Bryan told the Consortium late August that he had been working to encourage a sale and restart of Limetree Bay Refining.

The Consortium earlier this week [broke the news](#) that a company named St. Croix Energy comprised of local and national businessmen with deep pockets had entered an appearance in the Limetree Bay bankruptcy proceedings. According to a person familiar with the matter, the company was formed with the purpose of exploring the viability of an environmentally friendly restart of the refinery.