

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VI Crime Initiative Having Impact in St. Croix and St. Thomas Districts, Authorities Say

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Virgin Islands Police Department surge into high-crime areas on St. Croix and St. Thomas has resulted in a spike in illegal gun seizures and arrests over the past three months.

The crack-down on crime lent itself to discovery of less serious violations, as well, leading to 88 citations, or tickets, being issued in St. Thomas during the same October to December time frame, said Police Commissioner Trevor Velinor on Monday.

“It’s very important for us to address the small issues while also being very focused on the violent crime that’s taking place,” Mr. Velinor said.

Mr. Velinor provided the first public update on the police department's V.I. Crime Initiative (VICI), launched in October in close coordination with the peace officer corps of other executive branch agencies. He gave a run-down of VICI statistics during Monday's Government House press conference on St. Thomas.

The VICI is "an initiative where we can go after the worst of the worst while also trying to focus on the smaller incidents, to include traffic violations, and also to engage the public," Mr. Velinor said.

So far on St. Thomas, the VICI resulted in five illegal guns being taken off the street, 15 abandoned cars being towed and 88 citations handed out for traffic and other minor violations, Mr. Velinor said.

On St. Croix, 10 guns have been seized. Seventeen people have been arrested, including a federal parolee arrested in possession of two illegal firearms.

"We are stepping up efforts over the last few months to crack down on errant guns, firearms and how we can keep our people safe for the holiday season," according to Gov. Bryan.

In many ways, the Crime Initiative is a simple plan. Enforce the law, even the minor ones.

Take an October 24th arrest on St. Thomas. Officers assigned to the VICI observed a silver Toyota Corolla run a red light at Mandela Circle. Officers stopped the car and promptly identified the strong smell of marijuana. A search of the vehicle turned up 44 packets of marijuana, one firearm in the center console and 27 rounds of ammunition.

They interviewed the driver and requested to search the vehicle, discovering over 44 packets of marijuana, as well as one firearm in the center console of the vehicle to include 27 rounds of ammunition. The driver was arrested and charged with possession of an unlicensed firearm, possession of ammunition and possession drugs with the intent to distribute.

"The small things matter," Mr. Velinor said. "Something as simple as a traffic citation or traffic initiative where you stop a vehicle for speeding or running a red light or driving erratically can lead to the arrests, potentially, of individuals driving under the influence of intoxicants. As you can see, we've done that."

The very first case the VICI made involved an individual on parole for violation of federal law. He was arrested with two firearms in his possession. He was stopped for a traffic violation, Mr. Velinor said. "This was a very rich target we wanted to see off of our streets."

The VICI teams are comprised of VIPD officers and officers brought in from other agencies, particularly the VI Port Authority, Mr. Velinor said. The VIPD Intelligence Unit plays a crucial role, providing lists of repeat offenders and the communities in which the recidivists live and socialize. "We know that in every community there is a small amount of individuals who cause havoc on the larger community. Those are the individuals we want to get off of our streets."

Mr. Velinor said that the first phase of the V.I. Crime Initiative may soon wrap up, however, a second phase is on the drawing board.

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