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Cruise Ship Docked at WICO on Day of Shooting and Robbery Almost Left Port Early, But Fast Work By Local Officials Allayed Concerns

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The Crystal Serenity Cruise ship, seen in the backdrop of the Havensight Mall crime scene on Sat. Dec. 4, had made preparations to leave WICO ahead of its scheduled departure following the brazen crime. **By. EMMET PREVOST**

ST. THOMAS — It was shaping up to be another sunny if regular day at the Havensight Mall. The Crystal Serenity with its 375 guests and over 200 crew members had docked at the West Indian Company (WICO) early Saturday morning, and many of its passengers were expecting a day of activity and shopping.

But at about 11:00 a.m., [a brazen robbery and shooting incident rocked the mall](#) when three gunmen stormed the Glitter's jewelry store with guns blazing, shooting a security guard and a patron shopping items for her family. Both victims were rushed to the Schneider Regional Medical Center and nearly lost their lives, according to police reports.

The incident immediately shifted the mood at the Havensight Mall, with yellow tape cordoning off a large area, and ambulance and police siren lights transforming a tourist hot spot into a crime scene. Docked in the backdrop of the crime scene was the cruise ship Crystal Serenity. Concerned about its passengers, the ship kept its guests and crew onboard and had already prepared the vessel to leave WICO early.

But local officials worked expeditiously on a number of fronts to get the matter under control, said Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte during an interview with the Consortium Tuesday.

Mr. Boschulte, who also serves as the chairman of the WICO board, was on St. Croix that day [to welcome LIAT and its guests](#) as the airline has scheduled three visits to St. Croix this month. The commissioner had to cancel those plans and quickly spring into action, holding conversations with the lead of the Cruise Lines International Association to address the incident. Because the discussions were happening soon after the shooting and robbery, Mr. Boschulte had conversations with the V.I.P.D., Gov't House, the president of WICO and WICO's security team, as well as the security head of the Gov't Employees' Retirement System, which owns Havensight, "to understand specifically what was happening and to provide accurate information."

"The first concern was the livelihood of anybody that was in or around the area of the incident irrespective of whether they were residents or leisure guests. Safety is paramount," Mr. Boschulte said. "Secondly, is allowing for law enforcement to come in and do what they are specialized to do. And clearly thirdly is managing the stakeholder relationships that we have typically from a tourism standpoint. Police Commissioner Ray Martinez had to manage the situation from a law enforcement standpoint. From a tourism standpoint, after concern for life, after understanding that law enforcement has been engaged, is thirdly now to manage the strategic relationship and in this particular case is with the cruise industry."

Because of constant communication between affected parties, including assurances from the V.I.P.D. that the matter was under control, the Crystal Serenity's captain agreed to keep the ship in port until its departure time at 6:00 p.m., Mr. Boschulte said. Once the scene was cleared, guests and crew disembarked the ship and activities resumed. "The key was quick action and communication," he said.

Speaking specifically on the importance of safeguarding the territory's tourism product, Mr. Boschulte stressed that gun violence is unacceptable in any setting. But committing such dangerous and violent crimes in the heart of the territory's tourism industry could lead to lasting ramifications.

"We need to understand that the tourism industry represents 60 percent of our gross domestic product (GDP) indirect and direct. So when you have a situation where it impacts that particular business line, the ramifications are far deeper than whether or not somebody comes to the territory," he said. "It's the jobs, people's quality of life — all of these things are impacted if you're deemed to be seen as unsafe. That's where the concern is. It's bad anytime somebody gets shot, especially with regard to attempted robbery. But what we are very protective of is we understand that it runs deeper than whether or not a guest comes to the territory. It's everything else that's

impacted when we don't have them coming in as we have right now gearing to kickoff into the season."

The commissioner added, "Any crime is problematic, however when you have a crime particularly at this time of the year where you have local and leisure guests mingling together, shopping and having a good time, it was truly unfortunate."

The V.I.P.D. [has since arrested two individuals](#) deemed persons of interest, and the department continues to make progress on the case.

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