

Limetree closure a \$2 billion blow to V.I. economy

Daily News Staff

With the closure of the Limetree Bay Refinery, many expected a financial fallout, and a report from the Economic Research Bureau puts a dollar value on the hit the territory has taken.

Expected annual losses include a \$632 million reduction in the territory's gross domestic product, \$25 million lost in V.I. tax revenue and almost \$2 billion in lost economic activity, according to Government House.

The report explained that the closure will have a "ripple effect" on the territory's economy, as the refinery not only directly provided employment, but employees spent their wages and helped support industries such as construction, retail and business services.

"The Limetree Bay Refinery closure will impact many industries, including transportation, maintenance and repair, construction, engineering services, retail and wholesale trade, manufacturing, real estate and business services," the report states. "The more significant of these impacts will

be on St. Croix, where most workers and some suppliers reside. However, these are transitory impacts, wherein in the long run, the interaction of economic productivity of the workforce, capital investments and policy will determine the overall health of the U.S. Virgin Islands' economy."

The press release said the closure will result in the loss of:

- 800 jobs (direct and indirect)
- \$112 million in wages.
- \$1.8 billion in sales.
- \$632 million reduction in gross domestic product.

- \$19.7 million in individual income tax.

- \$4.6 million in Gross Receipts taxes.

- \$800,000 in trade and excise taxes.

- \$300,000 in donations to charitable organizations.

- \$237,000 in scholarships.

"Initial news of the refinery's closure elicited strong reactions from the community, but our team used only data and statistics to drive the production of this report," Economic Research Bureau director Allison De-

Gazon said.

"While we acknowledge the short-term impact of the refinery's halt, we remain cautiously optimistic that our economy will rebound as it did following the closure of HOVENSA," she said.

Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. said the closure of the refinery is an economic setback. However, he believes the steady increase of tourism and the many capital improvements and recovery projects in the territory should offset the effects, the press release said.

Fellows program seeks to attract young talent to government

By SARA KIRKPATRICK
Daily News Staff

The V.I. government is adding 12 new employees to its payroll under a fellowship program that seeks to train and keep young talent in the workforce.

Management and Budget Office Director Jenifer O'Neal introduced the group at a press briefing Tuesday at the University of the Virgin Islands on St. Thomas, noting they will be paid an annual salary of \$55,000 as full-time, exempt government employees with benefits over the course of the two-year program.

The "fellows" accepted into the V.I. Government's Financial Fellows Program have all graduated from college within the last three years and have varying degrees, Government House spokesperson Gerry Yandel said when contacted for additional information.

According to O'Neal, the 12 were chosen out of 38 applicants and will rotate every six months between four government agencies — her OMB office, as well as the Finance Department,



Fellow Acassia Ferguson, center, gives remarks during a press conference announcing the 12 new fellows accepted into the government's Financial Fellows Program. She is joined at the podium by fellows Desiree Fleming in back row from left, Lineek Williams, Malachi Peterson, Roberto Tirado, Mahlayi DeFoe, Harold Brown, Shani Isaac in front row, Victoria Gario, Management and Budget Office Director Jenifer O'Neal, Kahina Brannigan and Jamila Felix.

Office of Disaster Recovery and Internal Revenue Bureau.

"The fellows program was conceived many months ago, as a way to bring more young people into the public service, giving them opportunities to learn and be trained while being paid," O'Neal said. "Because it has been so incredibly hard to recruit persons with both the skills and the experience to fill vacancies within the GVI we ultimately

see this program as the beginning of an initiative that is a win-win for both the individual fellows and the GVI."

Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. weighed in on the program, which based on the annual salaries alone will cost the government over a half million dollars.

"We want to make sure we are keeping our talent, and that's what talent costs these days," he said, saying the program competes with similar state-

side internships.

Under the program, each fellow has been assigned a mentor.

St. Croix resident Acassia Ferguson is among the first 12 fellows.

"Thus far, we are two weeks into our current rotations and are developing strong foundations in our understanding of the roles of various departments and current projects underway," she said at Tuesday's press conference.

The other fellows are Roberto Tirado, Mahlayi DeFoe, Desiree Fleming, Jamila Felix and Kahina Brannigan of St. Thomas; Malachi Peterson, Shani Isaac, Harold Brown, Victoria Gario of St. Croix and Khaleila Krall and Lineek Williams from St. John.

Bryan spoke of his excitement about seeing the program that he had only previously dreamed about come to fruition. The governor noted that some participants were returning to the Virgin Islands after studying in the states, which made him "extremely proud."

"In the last three years, we have impacted the brain drain in such a significant way just by the legislation to get students free tuition. This program is another piece," Bryan said. "Hopefully next year we will be having 60, 100, 150 applicants trying to get into the program."

Ferguson said that she and her cohorts "are truly thankful for this opportunity, and are looking forward to making an impact and a great contribution to the Virgin Islands."

Vendors' Plaza kiosks receive nod from Historic Preservation Commission

By SUZANNE CARLSON
Daily News Staff

The St. Thomas-St. John committee of the Historic Preservation Commission met Tuesday and approved a design for kiosks at Vendors' Plaza on St. Thomas.

Commissioners expressed excitement and said they were impressed by the concept created by Creations Global Retail.

CEO Jac Crawford and Sales Director Chris Crawford presented the design and explained the features of the lockable units that can be fork-lifted off site in the event of extreme weather.

Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs Commissioner Richard Evangelista said an upgrade to the current cluster of tents is long overdue.

The location on the St. Thomas waterfront, adjacent to Fort Christian,

is highly visible for both locals and tourists alike, and many tents have been left tattered and faded by the rain and sun.

Vendors have complained for years about the lack of accommodations, and Evangelista said he's working to ensure everyone's needs are met.

Chris Crawford said the company has been working on the project since 2018, and wanted to incorporate "some of the Spanish colonial architecture."

Evangelista clarified that the architecture is Danish.

As a retail professional with experience in other markets, Jac Crawford suggested merchandise training for vendors at the site and scaling back cluttered displays packed with items in favor of a more curated display. He also said the row of vans parked along the plaza is unappealing to some visitors, and Evangelista agreed that practices

should be updated.

Commission member Kurt Marsh said that as an architect, he was impressed by the look of the design, but said the colors in particular are not necessarily in keeping with the local historic style.

But those changes "are simple, easy fixes," and the Crawfords agreed to update the rendering with whatever colors the commission feels are most appropriate.

Marsh also said the market has not typically been viewed as a place where locals shop, and commission members agreed that diversifying offerings will help appeal to a wider range of customers.

The Commission voted unanimously to approve the design, "pending confirmation of the adjusted color scheme as directed with Sean Krigger and the State Historic Preservation Office.



Rendering by CREATIONS GLOBAL RETAIL

The Historic Preservation Commission has approved new kiosks for Vendors' Plaza on St. Thomas.