



## Press Release

For Immediate Release: August 25, 2020

# 2020 Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting

The St. Thomas-St. John Chamber of Commerce held its Annual Meeting and election of Board Members on Friday, August 21, 2020 via a Zoom meeting. Outgoing Chamber President Sebastiano Paiewonsky Cassinelli opened the meeting with a recap of some of the highlights during his tenure as President which included the implementation of working groups comprised of members of the private and public sectors with subject matter expertise. Cassinelli stated that, “The premise is that by bringing these groups together and talking with, not at each other, better outcomes are available through a shared process. The cooperation between the two stakeholder groups – private and public sector - is vital for moving initiatives forward irrespective of differing approaches or beliefs.” In addition to partnering with the public sector, the Chamber typically collaborated with other private sector organizations and not-for-profits such as the USVI Hotel and Tourism Organization (“HTA”), Downtown Revitalization, Inc. (“DRI”), Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands (“CFVI”) and St. Croix Chamber of Commerce (“STX Chamber”). The key working groups today include: Historic District Revitalization, Cruise Ship and Tourism, Economic Development, Government Operations, Congressional Outreach and Energy. Cassinelli added that within the working group structure, the Chamber was able to touch many public policy issues and favorably impact the territories’ economic development. Cassinelli stated, “since before I assumed presidency and to this day, the Chamber has touched almost every public policy issue of importance-and that was made possible

by countless members of the private sector who gave generously of their time as well as public sector players who were willing to work the with us.”

Some of the areas positively impacted by the Chamber’s involvement and working group structure included assisting with the development of The Town’s Blueprint, a historic district transformational plan, and entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Public Works, the Chamber, DRI and CFVI allowing private sector representation on the design team developing the historic district revitalization initiatives including Main Street Enhancement, Veteran’s Drive and water transportation. Working with the Virgin Islands Port Authority and the West Indian Company Limited to implement harbor dredging and adding additional berthing capacity; partnering with the Economic Development Commission to develop and pass legislation to improve the EDC program. We hired representatives in DC to assist the USVI with passing legislation and expanding source income rules, which passed the U.S. Senate, and preparing an economic impact analysis on cannabis as a new industry in the territory and assisting with the drafting of the legislation.

## Guest Speaker:

### The Honorable Albert Bryan

The guest speaker at the annual meeting was the Honorable Albert Bryan, Governor of the Virgin Islands. The Governor discussed in great detail the unprecedented challenges posed by COVID 19 as it pertains to the health of the community and the economic impact to businesses in the territory. Governor Bryan reviewed the funds received by the territory as a result of the pandemic which has allowed the government to continue to operate at full service but shared that the road ahead will be challenging as tax revenue has significantly declined. The Governor discussed several issues including WAPA, GERS, the Cruise Industry, Crime and the many infrastructure projects currently underway.

## President & First Vice President/ President Elect – 2020-2021



**Shaine Gaspard**  
President



**John P. Woods**  
First Vice President/  
President Elect

## Newly Elected Board members – 2020-2021

Shaine Gaspard, of Southland Gaming was elected as President for the 2020-2021 term and John P. Woods owner of the Jaredian Design Group was elected as First Vice President/President Elect. Board members elected to a two year term include: Michael Allietta, President of International Private Bank; Scott Barber, President and CEO of Universal Business Supplies; Sharmane Brookes, Vice President/ Commercial Business at First Bank, USVI; Sebastiano Paiewonsky Cassinelli, Officer of Isidor Paiewonsky Associates and a Co-Managing Member of St. Thomas Properties; Adriane Dudley, Esq. of Dudley Rich, LLP; Hugo Hodge, Jr. Executive Vice President and General Manager of Tantalus Systems for the Caribbean Basin; Navin Sakhrani, Owner of Grand Jewelers and; Rosa C. Thomas owner of Payroll Vault, LLC. Directors elected to a one year term include: Dr. Brendan Anzalone, CEO of AeroMD; Adrien Austin, Co-founder of Drive Green, VI; Dexter Freeman, Manager AT&T Network Operations; Charles Irons, General Manager of Real Estate at Yacht Haven Grande; Tony Murray, President and CEO of Virgin Excursions and

Virgin Port Services; Cassandra P. Webster, Vice President and Commercial Relationship Officer at Banco Popular; Brad Wilson, Founder and CEO of Brad's Deals.

## Highlights of Chamber President Shaine Gaspard Address

Prior to adjourning the meeting, Chamber President Shaine Gaspard addressed the members and thanked everyone for their support. The Chamber President stated that “No matter where you are in the business spectrum, business is not as usual. Industries and small businesses have been devastated. Some people may think that this is the most unfortunate time to try to take on the challenges of the Chamber, and I get it, but I don’t believe it’s the worst time either. I am not sure anybody can adequately understand the scope and challenges that we face in the near future, but here we are. There is no playbook on how to navigate business through a global pandemic. But I do know, that the Virgin Islands success didn’t happen by accident and it didn’t happen overnight. We live in a symbiotic business ecosystem in the Virgin Islands where good businesses survive because of other good businesses”. Mr. Gaspard indicated that he was excited to work with the newly elected board and that he would also be calling on former members of the board for their assistance and guidance.

## Chamber thanked Former Board Members

Long serving members of the Board of Directors Thomas B. Brunt of MSI Building Supplies, Mike Daswani of Royal Caribbean, Cecile deJongh of St. Thomas Properties and Steve Morton of TOPA Properties were thanked for their many years of service. The Chamber also thanked Jason Charles of Southland Gaming, Erika Kellerhals of Kellerhals Ferguson Kroblin PLLC, Alex Querrard of Roy Lester Schneider Hospital, Adam Reeve of Cruise Ship Excursions and Marjorie Roberts of Marjorie Rawls Roberts Attorney At Law for their service on the Board of Directors.