

>> This is WLDV, 107.9 FM,
transmitting from
Blue Mountain, St. Croix,
broadcasting from downtown
Christiansted, St. Croix, and
downtown Charlotte Amalie
St. Thomas.
107.9 FM, Da Vybe, a VI station.
>> We see you feelin' the vibe!
>> [Singing] You're turnin' me
on, you're turnin' me on.
>> Ha! We know, baby.
>> It's 107.9!
>> [Echoing] Da Vybe FM.
[The Pointer Sisters' "Yes We
Can Can" plays]
Now's the time for all good men
to get together with one
another.
We got to iron out our problems
and iron out our quarrels and
try to live as brothers.
And try to find peace within
without stepping on one another.
And do respect the women of the
world.
Remember you all have mothers.
We got to make this land a
better land than the world in
which we live.
And we got to help each man be a
better man...
>> Good morning, good morning,
Virgin Islands.
You are listening to
"Ability Radio."
I am one of your several hosts,
[Chuckles] Amelia Headley
LaMont.
I'm the Executive Director of
the Disability Rights Center of
the Virgin Islands, and I'm
joined today by my co-host,
Iris Bermudez.
Iris, good morning.
>> Good morning.
Good morning, Virgin Islands.
>> How are you?
>> Oh, I'm fine.
>> Okay, good.
[Both laugh]
We have a special guest today,

and we are really privileged to have an individual who has been doing an amount of amazing work here in the U.S. Virgin Islands. His name is Jay Rollins, and he is the Executive Director of the St. Croix Long Term Recovery Group.

Is that correct?

>> That's correct.

>> Great.

>> Good morning.

>> How are you?

>> I'm well. How are you?

>> I'm fine.

Thank you for joining us.

You will be a font of information for us this morning. We have a lot to learn, and, regrettably, June is coming up, and we know what June means.

So while we are in celebration mode -- kudos to the folks who are enjoying

St. Thomas Carnival -- we also want to plan and be prepared for the upcoming hurricane season, dare I say?

So, first of all, I think the listening audience would be very interested to know that there are a team of amazing volunteers who are doing great work.

So if you can, first of all, Jay, tell us about yourself, and then we'll talk about what you do.

>> [Laughs] Sure.

[Laughter]

Well, I am Jay Rollins.

I've lived in St. Croix now for four years.

I was here for both Irma and Maria, and although I have about 15 years working in disaster response, this was the first time I've lived through the disaster and then worked the response, also.

>> Oh, wow.

>> So I don't recommend it.

[Laughter]

It's much easier for those folks to come in for two, three weeks,

couple months at a time, then go back home, rather than 105 days without electricity.

>> Yeah.

>> I think that's what we ended up with.

>> Well, it makes you more empathetic, you know?

>> Absolutely.

It really changes the way that you view the work, because it's one thing to fly into a place and have empathy and think you understand, and it's another thing to...

>> To live it.

>> ...to be a survivor and live it.

>> Yeah, live it, yeah.

>> It's a much different feeling -- not that I ever want to do that again.

[Laughter]

That box is checked for me now.

>> Well, you would be the subject-matter expert when it comes to this.

>> [Laughing] Yeah.

Whether I wanted to be or not, right?

[Laughter]

>> So, tell us a little -- you know, what skills do you bring to this community?

>> Sure.

I worked for almost 12 years for a humanitarian-aid and disaster-response organization, through the United Methodist Church.

>> Mm.

>> So I've worked in 34 different countries around the world.

I've worked in Syria.

I've worked all over the continent of Africa.

I've worked in Japan, covering the triple disaster there.

I worked Haiti, and I worked Katrina.

I go all the way back to 2009.

So it's interesting to work disaster in the U.S. versus

outside of the U.S., because as we know, here in the United States, we have the machine that comes in, FEMA, and FEMA does their thing, and then there are all these other programs that come in line, which is fantastic.

And when I first started in this response, I was working for the Episcopal Diocese of the Virgin Islands, so I was working recovery on our three islands, plus Tortola and Virgin Gorda.

>> Mm.

>> And the difference in the recovery process in the British side is so different than what we're experiencing here, and they didn't have any of the resources that we received.

>> Hmm.

>> So it's just really interesting to -- you know, the same geographic region, and to watch how varied the response is just because of whatever government we have over us.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> So, here, it's good that we have the FEMA machine, but you also have to know how to work the FEMA machine, and you have to know how to work these local programs.

So, one of the things that happens after a disaster in the United States is FEMA and the Red Cross put together, generally, nonprofit groups, concerned citizens, advocates for recovery, and you form a long-term recovery group.

And that's what we did here.

I think it was almost a week after Maria.

We met at the American Red Cross -- giant roomful of folks, and in those four hours that we had during curfew --

[Laughter]

And we got together, and we said, "We need to become official, and we need to figure

out how to make this work."
So, we officially became an LTRG
in January, and I was hired in
October.

So there's two staff on the
LTRG.

Everyone else, the 220-some-odd
members, are all volunteer.
And it's nonprofits, it's
concerned citizens, but we are
grassroots.

I spend my days trying to find
money to help keep us funded, to
keep the programs funded.

We receive no federal funding to
date.

>> Hmm. Okay.

>> Yeah.

>> Wow.

>> So this is truly an effort of
the heart and grassroots and of
the community.

And our goal is to make sure
that anyone that doesn't fall
into one of these programs,
those that are marginalized,
those that were marginalized
before the storms, we want to
make sure they don't fall
through the cracks.

We want to make sure that
everyone on this island -- and
through the LTRGs on St. Thomas
and St. John also -- and our
goal is to make sure that we're
safety net for those folks.

>> How long is long term?

>> [Sighs]

>> [Laughs]

I'm sorry.

>> Let me give you an example.

>> Okay.

>> My last case from Katrina was
10 years after Katrina.

>> Mm.

>> Oh, wow. That's long.

>> That's a long time.

>> Yeah.

>> And that was Katrina, so that
was Stateside, where volunteer
teams could come in and bring
their own buses, bring their own
supplies.

We have a different situation

here.

>> Yeah.

>> I think, about five years post, the majority of these islands will feel recovered and it will literally just be those folks that we catch falling through the cracks that we're going to be working with for as long as we need to.

>> As long as we don't have another one, maybe.

[Laughs]

>> That's the trick.

>> Yeah, yeah.

>> You know, we got very lucky last year through storm season.

>> Yeah.

>> But like you said, Amelia -- we're, what, five, six weeks out from June 1st? -- we still have so many people living under a blue tarp.

>> Yes.

>> One of the things I advocated to our local government this week was we need another emergency-tarp program.

We don't have time to get a roof back on everybody's house.

We can't go into another storm season with folks living under a blue tarp that was designed to last six months.

We're 18, 19 months post.

>> Right.

>> So, hopefully, we'll figure something out, and we're going to do our best to make sure folks are hopefully dry through the storm season, and we're going to pray and send good karma into the universe...

[Laughter]

...that no storms come our way again this year and we're gonna celebrate Thanksgiving Day at the end of November.

>> Right, right.

>> Right.

>> A lot to be thankful for.

>> Absolutely.

>> When I was looking at your website, trying to gather some

information, I saw the words "unity of community," and that struck me.

>> Yeah.

>> Because I thought that was so significant, about the unity that's needed to take care of the community.

Can you talk about how you came to that concept?

I think it's a great concept, and I know that we're kind of lacking in that.

>> Sure.

You know, the phrase that came up so after the storms was "VI strong," right?

>> Right.

>> There's a resiliency in this community, and that's part of what I love about St. Croix, is the community.

I've never felt so welcomed so immediately, living anywhere.

>> That says a lot.

>> Yeah, yeah.

>> What we saw is that, like I said, FEMA's great, and FEMA does their thing, but if the community doesn't come together, there's only so far FEMA can take us.

FEMA is meant to be a support. They're not meant to be the superheroes coming in to save us, so we have to do for ourselves.

And if you're marginalized, that's harder to do sometimes. There are systems in place that kind of want to keep you marginalized, so we have to fight for everyone, and we have to come together -- rich, poor, black, white, Hispanic -- it doesn't matter.

This entire community has to come together.

And I remind folks, those first few distribution lines after the storms, it didn't matter who you were.

We were all in line together.

We were all out there under the

sun together, waiting in those lines, waiting for the distributions.

My goal is, the next time this happens -- and we know it will happen again -- that we are so prepared and we've learned so much from this, that we have community food spots where we've stored local foods so that a community d-- like Frederiksted. They had to come so far east to get to a distribution.

We had so many seniors in Frederiksted that didn't have transportation to get to those distribution spots.

That's not good.

So we have to plan, and we have to make sure that -- First of all, those MREs were horrible.

[Laughter]

>> Okay.

>> I never want to taste an MRE again in my life.

But we have -- St. Croix could very easily be food-secure, and there's no reason that we can't devise systems for our farmers that, rather than MREs, they're getting the funds that come in for emergency response...

>> That's right.

>> ...and that they're locally based and we've got solar panels on these distribution points within the communities so there are places for folks to charge their phones, places for folks to listen to the radio, since that was our, really, only source of communication, especially in those first few days.

To me, it was like 1940s, when everyone was sitting around the radio at night, waiting to hear what happened that day.

>> Right.

>> Right.

>> So there's two sides to this.

There's a recovery side, which is really what we're focused on, but there's also the

preparedness and mitigation side, and that comes from what we call a VOAD, voluntary organizations active in disaster.

So part of what we're doing -- in fact, I go to Nashville tomorrow to attend the National VOAD Conference, but we are reconstituting the Virgin Islands VOAD so that our local government also has a source for concerned citizens that are trained and know what they're doing.

And it's "unity in community." These are the nonprofits coming together.

This is everyone collaborating so that, when we have a disaster, we know exactly where we can go.

>> Hmm.

So, this sounds very interesting.

We're going to continue in the next little bit.

We're going to take a quick break -- quick break.

[Laughter]

You're listening to "Ability Radio."

>> ...out our quarrels and try to live as brothers.

And try to find peace within without stepping on one...

>> Start your week with smooth jazz with a twist at the...

>> ...with one another.

We got to iron out our problems and iron out our quarrels and try to live as brothers.

And try to find peace within without stepping...

>> We're back.

You're listening to "Ability Radio."

I'm one of your hosts, Amelia Headley LaMont, and we are joined today by the Executive Director of the Long Term Recovery Group, Jay

Rollins.

If you've missed any portion of this program, please be reminded that you can check out our website, which is at drcvi.org. This program is recorded and it will be posted on our website -- and transcribed, as well, if you wish to read it.

Also, Iris, you had a question?

>> Yes.

During the break, we were talking about volunteerism and how you were able to, you know, get all these folks together to help you out, because at one time -- and I remember this since I work here in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico -- it's hard to get volunteers to come forth unless you're gonna pay them.

>> Right.

>> [Laughing] So it's not volunteering.

They couldn't grasp that concept.

How did you do it and get so many people?

Because I looked at, again, your website, and you seem to have so many different committees and a lot of people going to your meetings.

>> Yeah, in the immediate aftermath of the storm, everyone was sort of in that mode --

"What can I do to help?"

And we have had a core group of volunteers since that time that really make the LTRG, the Long Term Recovery Group, what it is.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> We have seen, over the last 18 months, a slowdown.

>> Slowdown.

>> There's volunteer fatigue, which is completely understandable.

It's one thing if you're in a structure that wasn't damaged or if you've had your repairs made and you're well on the way to recovery, to feel like you can

volunteer.

It's another thing if you're living under a blue tarp, to want to come out and feel like you need to help your neighbor, especially this far into the recovery.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> What I will tell you is, when you do come out and you're living under that blue tarp and you can help your neighbor, it takes some of that stress away because the act of giving helps relieve the stress.

So we will be hiring another Executive Director for Community Engagement, and that person will be working with the community to try to get more volunteers in. We're a resource, so even if you just come to our meetings, which are every other Monday at the St. Croix Christian Church behind Pueblo from 3:00 to 5:00, the amount of information that's delivered there is invaluable because we don't distribute just anything that we hear on the grapevine.

We're getting things directly from the source.

So that's an opportunity.

Even if you don't want to be on a committee, even if you don't want to volunteer, just coming and getting that information, you can take that back and you can tell your neighbor or you can tell your family, and you'll know.

Because what we've seen, especially with these first few housing programs, there was so much misinformation.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> And, Iris, before we even went on the air, we were talking about some of the information -- you know, the steps of the EHRVI program and what you have to go through and the fact that that program is done.

And there were folks that were

folks that were halfway into the queue that now need to know to contact the EnVision program to make sure that their paperwork is transferred and to see if they qualify for that program.

>> Now, clarify -- the EHRVI program is?

>> It is completed.

That was the FEMA-funded program.

>> Okay.

That's for roof repairs?

>> That was for roof repair.

>> Okay.

>> The EnVision program is more encompassing, and their priority will be the folks that were in the EHRVI program that didn't receive any benefit, and then they're also looking at folks that lost everything, because those folks haven't had any assistance yet.

>> Wow.

>> If your house was completely destroyed, there was no program for you.

So this program will, if your house was down to the slab and the cistern -- even if you lost the slab and the cistern, this program can help.

And that's the HUD program that's being through Housing and Finance Authority.

And they're open in St. Thomas, and here in St. Croix, their office officially opens on Monday.

And they have case managers there that will walk you through the process and let you know if you're eligible for that program.

>> What's the contact information for that program?

>> Let me pull it up so I make sure I give you the right thing.

[Both chuckle]

There's an 800 number, which is 888-239-3387.

And their website is www.vistormrecovery.com.

>> Mm.
>> Great. Thank you.
Thank you.
Okay. Good.
>> So, since June of this year,
we've been bringing in -- Thank
goodness for Lutheran Disaster
Response.
We have been bringing in
volunteer teams from the States
to work on homes, homes that we
knew wouldn't qualify for the
program.
We've even worked on some homes
that went through the program
and the repairs weren't great,
so we've gone back and made some
minor repairs to them.
And, again, we're focused on
seniors.
We're focused on folks with
disabilities and those that we
know just haven't had a shot.
And, to date, we've completed 32
homes using volunteers.
>> That's excellent.
>> The volunteer equates to more
than \$1 million worth of labor
that we've had for volunteers.
And so we're also looking for
locals -- you know, on the
weekend, if you work nights and
you want to spend a couple hours
on the day, come join these
teams.
We'll put you to work.
>> Mm-hmm.
>> How would they be able to do
that?
>> They can contact us on our
website, which is
www.stxltrg.org.
There's a contact form there.
And we will connect you with
Lutheran Disaster Response.
You can contact Lutheran
Disaster Response, also.
>> Okay, is there a phone number
to...
>> I don't have that phone
number with me, I'm sorry.
>> Okay, not a problem.
>> [Laughs]
>> Not a problem.

Folks, you can call the Disability Rights Center at 772-1200, and we will get that information for you.

>> Thank you.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> So, where do the workers who are volunteering -- where do they stay?

Do you have the equipment to do these repairs?

How do you manage that?

>> How do we work that, yeah.

[Laughs]

Currently, we have a church that's housing -- Right now we can only take about 16 to 20 volunteers at a time because of space.

We all know there's a housing crisis.

>> Oh, yes.

>> [Chuckles]

The last thing we want to do is take away homes that other residents could be living in. We, in the last month, have entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Episcopal Diocese of the Virgin Islands, and we are converting St. Dunstan's into a volunteer-housing complex. And we'll move the LTRG offices also into St. Dunstan's, and our disaster-case managers will also be housed in St. Dunstan's.

>> Great.

>> So we've got some work to do. It'll be a couple months before we're there, but when St.

Dunstan's is complete, we should be able to host 80 to 100 volunteers at a time.

So if you do that math, since June, we've completed 30-some-odd homes, largely with donated building materials. We've received a few grants specifically for building materials.

When the Danish were here, the DEMA, all the tools that they were using they left.

>> Hmm.

>> So they had purchased all the tools, and then they left them here, so they donated them to us.

So we have tools, we have volunteer laborers.

These are some skilled laborers, too.

It's primarily been through the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission group.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> And it's mainly the Southeastern quadrant of the United States, where the volunteers have been coming from.

But part of my goal in Nashville this week -- there are other religious organizations and faith-based organizations that have these mobilized volunteer teams, so we want to attract as many volunteers as possible.

Again, I don't want this recovery going 10 years, and the more volunteer labor we can get there, the more progress we can make.

>> Yeah.

You were talking about the unity of community.

I also noticed that you had a lot of different committees.

>> Yes.

>> Can you talk a little bit? Because maybe that will entice people who are listening to -- "Well, I'm interested in that. Maybe I'll join that group."

>> Sure.

So, we do our work through the committees, and it's my job to make sure everyone's talking to each other and that we're all coordinated.

But, of course, one of the most essential committees right now is our Disaster Case Management Committee.

We have currently on the island six disaster-case managers, and these are the boots on the

ground.

These are the folks that work with the beneficiaries from start to finish, and it's hand in hand, walking side by side. They know these programs. They know the response. They're going to do everything in their power to make sure that every resource on this island has been exhausted to get you back to what we call the "new normal," because we're not gonna get back to normal. Normal doesn't exist.

But we can get back to a new normal, and that's their job. And so the Disaster Case Management Committee helps oversee and coordinate that. And if anybody is in need, you can call our hotline to get connected to a disaster-case manager.

And that's 340-473-5305.

I've secured funding for additional disaster-case managers, so we will keep hiring.

We should have, I think, close to nine by the end of the summer, by the time the grant money comes through.

And then, ultimately, I'd love to have 20, but I've got to find some more grants.

[Laughter]

>> Now, these case managers -- Let's do a role-play here.

>> Sure.

>> You call into this hotline.

>> Yes.

>> What can a person expect from that?

>> They can expect a case manager to get their story.

>> Okay.

>> They'll want to find out what happened during the storm, what's been happening since the storm, if they've received any help at all, and even if they have, that's okay, because we all know that usually that

doesn't go far enough.

>> Right.

>> We also know that, if you received FEMA funding and let's say FEMA gave you \$500 for your roof, you couldn't find anybody to do your roof for \$500, and you had to feed your family, so you spent that \$500 on food, FEMA technically could come back and ask for that \$500 back at any point.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> Ooh.

>> Yeah, our disaster-case managers will work with you to make sure that you're covered in case FEMA comes back to do an audit and can help you make the case that said, "Hey, I had to feed my babies, and I spent that \$500 on groceries, and I'm still living under a blue tarp."

>> Mm-hmm.

>> So that's what the disaster-case managers are trained to do.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> And they're your support. They're your friends. They come to you.

And it's a...

>> Literally come to you?

>> Literally come to you.

[Laughs]

And, again, right now we see the population that we're serving are primarily senior citizens.

>> Yes.

>> How long are they on the hotline?

>> Well, if it's --

>> Just --

>> Yeah, usually it's all the time.

>> Oh, wow.

>> And if you get the voicemail, just leave your name and contact number, and they'll call you back.

>> Okay, good.

>> Ideally, a disaster-case manager will only have about 35 active cases.

>> Uh-huh.
>> Currently, ours have close to 80.
[Laughs]
>> That's a lot.
>> So I'm so grateful to our disaster-case managers and the work that they do.
>> Yeah.
>> And they're so creative in finding solutions.
So, once they've exhausted all those resources, including the resources that we can bring, if there is still a need, then we have the Unmet Needs Committee.
>> Mm-hmm.
>> The Unmet Needs Committee has formed a round table.
Part of my job this week is to find funders for that round table.
>> Mm.
>> But when the funders are sitting at the round table, the case is presented to them, anonymously, and it outlines what the needs still are. And then, ideally, that's funded through us.
Again, we want to get everybody back to the new normal.
So if we don't have the resource available on the island, the Unmet Needs Committee comes in to find those funders to then help that beneficiary get back to where they need to be.
We have a Rebuild and Construction Committee, which is an exciting committee, because that's where you actually get to witness the work, and every time we complete a home, we do a Last Nail service, and so whatever construction team is here at that point, usually as many of us from the LTRG that can come, and the homeowner takes the very last nail and symbolically drives it into their home as a celebration of completeness.
>> Mm-hmm.

>> So that committee, again is looking at where we can get additional building supplies and who can we go to for this and coordinating those volunteer teams coming in, and, largely, it's been Lutheran Disaster Response that has taken in -- Commissioner Chris Finch is the chair of that committee.

We have our Youth Committee. Our Youth Committee is focusing on making sure that the needs of our youth are met.

And that's a little more difficult, because you'd expect that, you know, if there's a family structure in place, that the parents are taking care of that, but we know that parents are overwhelmed, and we know that our children went for an entire year missing half their education, and, you know, there's all kinds of data that we can see -- the rise in crime and the rise in violence -- and, ultimately, we'll be able to connect that with data back to the fact that we lost half a school year.

So, tomorrow, in fact, our Youth Committee is holding a Youth Opportunity Fair at Sunny Isle, and they brought in all these organizations that have opportunities for youth during the summer and even after school, and parents can take their children there and get them signed up for activities for the summer.

There will also be giveaways. We'll have information on disaster preparedness, on what the youth can do to prepare for disasters, including we're looking at offering -- it won't be tomorrow, but looking at offering a youth CERT training, which is Citizen Emergency Response Team, because there is opportunity for our youth in times of disaster, and even in

blue sky, that they can help
prepare.

So, tomorrow from 1:00 to 4:00
at the Sunny Isle Amphitheater,
we will be out there.

You'll see the LTRG T-shirts.

Everybody's invited.

It is a free event.

There's no charge.

There will be live
entertainment.

I think we've got the

Moko Jumbies again.

We've got Young Gifted Talented
performing.

Hopefully they're performing.

If they hear this, please
confirm.

And it'll just be a nice event,
and the weather will be nice,
and come out and find out what
St. Croix has to offer to our
youth.

>> And that's really good
because Amelia and I were
talking last week about how a
lot of the post traumatic stress
is impacting our children...

>> Absolutely.

>> ...especially in St. Thomas.
I mean, on all the islands, and
when I saw that you also have a
Wellness Committee, I said,
"Okay, they're taking care of,
you know, a lot of things here."

>> Yeah.

>> So, you know...

>> And one of the things that
our Wellness Committee has been
fantastic at doing is connecting
our faith-based leaders...

>> Mm-hmm.

>> ...which is such an important
aspect in community, and when we
get all the faith-based leaders
in a room together and they can
talk and they can compare ideas
and they can say what's working
for them and what isn't working
for them, it's a really
fantastic experience, and I
don't want to say anything too
much on air, but there are plans
that these faith leaders are

organizing to really help take care of the community in times of need, and it doesn't matter if you're a part of that congregation or even a part of that faith tradition.

We're looking at it as a community-based piece.

So I'm very excited, and next time I come on, hopefully I'll have more information about that for you all.

But the Wellness Committee is truly focused on the lack of mental health services.

We really have nothing.

And it's -- it's stressful.

I mean, we have to deal with a culture that doesn't necessarily want to talk about mental health issues.

>> No.

>> But even if we're at a point now where folks are ready to move past that, there's no service available, so we're looking at ways to bring in those resources, and we've got a lot of trainings that the Wellness Committee brings in, again, around PTSD, around just mental and physical self care, and those are posted on our website and on our Facebook page.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> And we're at [facebook.com/stxltrg](https://www.facebook.com/stxltrg).

>> Yeah, and that's really interesting because we work with special education students, and that's one of the things that we're hearing from school officials, that these kids are still acting out because of those hurricanes that they experienced, you know, so...

>> The amount of phone calls that the office received on Thursday morning after those storms Wednesday night, and the trauma that our children went through...

>> Really? Wow.

>> ...reliving.
You know, that's the first time we've had thunder and lightning like that and all that torrential rain and wind.
>> So it came back.
>> So it just comes right back. I even experienced it to a bit.
>> You said, "Ooh."
>> And you feel like, "I should know better," you know?
But it's okay.
You know, we lived through it, and we have to acknowledge that it triggers.
>> Yeah.
>> You know, suddenly, in the moment on Wednesday night, I was flashing back to sitting -- it was around 1:30, 2:00 AM the night that Maria came though, and my ears were popping about every three seconds and feeling the windows start to give and shake and the concrete pillar that I was next to shaking. And all that comes back from a thunderstorm.
>> Right.
>> So, it's a real issue, and it's one of the ways, again -- There's unity, so it can't just be non-profits and government. It has to be a collaboration of governments.
>> You said something about, in the context of the youth fair, something about blue skies, and, sir, can you tell us what the blue sky is?
>> Sure, so, in disaster recovery lingo...
>> Okay.
>> Thank you for pointing out that I'm speaking discovery recovery.
I could have a whole conversation in acronyms with you if you wanted.
"Blue sky" refers to a time with no disaster.
That's it.
So we're in blue sky times right now.

>> Okay.
>> Oh, okay.
>> And, ideally, you do recovery and preparedness work in blue sky.
>> Okay.
>> Because we're also learning now -- 'cause not only were we dealing with recovery, but the whole mitigation and preparedness piece we're having to put back in. Normally, it's a cycle, but here we're having to do it at the same time because we only have six months out of the year where we're not under the threat... Well, we're under the threat of disaster all the time, to be honest, but the known threats, the hurricane season that comes every year. And we have to prepare. No one ever expected two back-to-back category 5 hurricanes...
>> Not at all.
>> ...to impact this entire territory.
>> Right.
>> And Puerto Rico. We just lost -- we weren't prepared to not be able to get resources here. And that's... you can't blame anybody, but what we can do is say, "This happened. We know this happened." They're talking about a category 6 now because of Irma and Maria.
>> Really?
>> Yeah.
>> That's scary. That is scary.
>> Hmm.
>> So, you know, climate change is real.
>> Yeah.
>> Water's getting warmer. These storms are gonna continue to get bigger, so we have to be prepared for the biggest.
>> Mm-hmm.
>> And we have to be prepared

that, hey, we can get two of the
in a row.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> And what do we do?

>> Mm-hmm.

>> And these are big questions,
but our entire territory has to
come together to think about
that.

>> Right.

>> And the impact that we have
in our daily lives and the
changes that we can make to
mitigate the next storm, to make
sure that we don't have to
experience this long of
recovery, and making sure we're
taking care of everybody.

>> Right.

>> Because those with means will
take care of themselves, but
it's time for us to come
together and make sure that
everybody, no matter where they
are on the economic scale, no
matter what race, religion,
creed, that we're coming
together to make sure, because
we're only complete humans when
everyone is a complete human.

>> Right.

Do we have in place now -- and
I'm not sure, that's why I'm
asking the question -- of where
a person could go if they can't
stay in their home?

>> Shelters?

>> Shelters, thank you, that was
the word I was looking for.

Do we have shelters now?

Is that now established?

Are we in accordance to where
these shelters are?

>> I don't want to speak for the
government...

>> Right.

>> ...but we did meet with them
a couple weeks ago when they
were doing tours of facilities
and inspections, so I have a
feeling that shelters will be
announced by June 1...

>> Okay.

>> ...but I haven't heard an

official announcement of where shelters would be, but I do know that the territory's working on it.

>> Okay, and I'm also intrigued when you talked about places where persons can go and get, you know, like, MREs.

>> Right.

>> Tarps.

>> Right.

>> Is that established, or is that something you also have to with the government, as well?

>> It's a plan, and it's one of the plans that came out of the community planning through FEMA, to look at these sort of local spots, community stations.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> So, it is a plan, and there are folks actively working on it.

>> Okay, so we don't have anything concrete yet?

>> Ground hasn't been broken anywhere on anything.

>> Okay.

>> But there is a plan, and there are permits and all those fun bureaucratic things that are in place are coming through.

>> So, LTRG -- Long Term Recovery Group, would work in tandem with what entity to get those spots identified, and then tell us where these spots are?

Is it VITEMA?

Is it...

>> It would be Health and Human Services and with VITEMA.

>> Okay.

>> And we're partnering with the St. Croix Foundation.

They're our fiscal sponsor, and they're really taking on these community planning challenges, and they have a staff person in place now that's just focused on the community plan that FEMA helped create with the territory based on community feedback, so they're really taking the lead on this, which is fantastic.

>> The St. Croix Foundation?
>> The St. Croix Foundation.
>> Okay, alright, that's good to know.
>> And they go to your meetings, too?
>> They come to every meeting.
>> Every meeting.
>> And our office is next door to their office, so I'm in their office probably more than they want to see me.
>> Okay, good.
>> What's your sense of response from, you know, potential foundations?
>> Yeah.
>> We've had -- There's one group in particular, Global Giving, that has been absolutely fantastic.
We have four grants through them right now.
They have broken through their mold, essentially, to try to accommodate us, because they listen, and we tell them what the need is, and they're like, "Okay, well, we've never done this before, but we'll try it."
>> Mm-hmm.
>> And the other thing, if you've ever written a grant -- and I know you've written a grant -- the paperwork, the follow up, the reporting -- Global Giving makes that as easy as possible.
Sometimes for a quarterly report, all I have to do is send a photo and a story.
>> Oh, wow.
>> And, you know, annually, we got to do a little bit more.
>> Sure.
>> But they've just been such a great partner to work with, so we have a grant for disaster case management through them.
We have a grant for building materials.
Cruzan Rum has partnered with them, which is how we first were introduced with them, and,

currently, the LTRG's on all three islands are getting a percentage of sales of Cruzan Rum through Global Giving.

>> Excellent.

>> Yeah, so that's really helped.

And then the last one, I'll go ahead and announced this, even though we haven't made it public yet -- they gave us a grant for us to do a mini-grants program, and our mini-grants program will be focused on our faith leaders so that they can apply for up to a \$5,000 grant, and we have a limited amount of funds, but we hope to at least be able to do 20 to 25 faith-based groups to look at preparedness to create these community events.

If they've got a soup kitchen, to increase the capacity of their soup kitchen.

If you've got a clothing drive or anything that they can do, but, again, being able to provide our faith-based leaders with some financial resources, because the faith-based community really misses out in the recovery.

There's not a lot of programs to help faith-based organizations, and that's why you see so many of our churches and synagogues and mosques still with blue tarps.

'Cause everybody was underinsured -- that's my word of 2017 or 2018 --

"underinsured" -- and you don't have the money to put the roof back on, so we're trying to do all that we can for our faith leaders, also.

>> Okay, well, we're gonna ply you with more questions after we take a short break.

You're listening to Ability Radio.

>> Be a better man with the kindness that we give
I know we can make it

I know that we can
I know darn well

>> Now's the time for all good
men to get together with one
another
We got to iron out our problems
>> We're back.
You're listening to Ability
Radio.
My name is Amelia Headley
LaMont.
I'm joined by my co-host, Iris
Bermudez, and our special guest
today is Jay Rollins.
He is the executive director of
the St. Croix Long Term Recovery
Group.
We are delighted.
We've learned a lot today, and
so, um, I'm heartened by the
fact -- we said over the break
-- that you are here to stay?
The St. Croix Long Term Recovery
Group -- is that correct?
>> Absolutely.
>> We have it on tape.
Yes.
I'll write it down.
>> I mean, we can't go away
because we all live here.
>> Right.
>> So, you know, this is, again,
we're concerned citizens.
We're non-profits.
We're not the federal folks
coming in that will ultimately
have to leave.
And we're in it because this is
home, and we want home to be
complete.
>> Okay.
>> So, yeah, we're not going
anywhere.
>> You know, one of the things
that I think FEMA was criticized
was the way that they were
reconstructing homes.
>> Mm-hmm.
>> What are people saying about
your reconstruction efforts?
>> 'Cause I know Chris Finch is
a great person, so...

>> Yeah, so, I will give Chris Finch all the credit. He has been just a godsend to me, because he has so many years of experience on this island. He's done this hurricane thing before, and he also knows the ins and outs of the government, which has been very helpful. But the teams that we're bringing in are highly skilled labor for the most part. You know, when you work with these faith-based volunteer groups, they go through training, so this isn't just anybody can pick up a hammer and hop on a plane.

>> On a roof or a plane.

>> Yeah, and come do some good work here in St. Croix. These are folks that have had training and that listen.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> And they're here to do good, so they're here to learn as much as they are to provide labor, because they want to experience the culture, and they want to get to know the beneficiary that they're working with, and, you know, we work with architects and we get architectural drawings for everything that we do. We get our building permits, and, you know, we do everything by the book.

>> Good.

>> And then we have dedicated folks that aren't getting paid, which I think is a huge difference. They're there because they want to be, and they want to make sure that the work is good.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> That reminds me of the program that former President Carter...

>> Habitat for Humanity.

>> Habitat for Humanity.

Yeah, yeah.

>> Yeah, yeah.

>> That's really good.
I'm glad to hear that.
>> Absolutely.
>> Good.
>> Well, something that we need to really, hopefully, you know, instill in our community -- in any community -- is how important volunteerism is.
>> Absolutely.
>> You know?
>> I can -- We can talk through some numbers...
>> Mm-hmm.
>> ...just so you get an idea. The initial report -- not the initial -- the report that came out from FEMA was that, territory-wide, there were 23,371 homes that were severely damaged or destroyed.
>> Mm-hmm.
>> The EHRVI program just closed out, and I think the number that they released said that they had worked on 7,100 homes.
>> Wow.
>> Wow.
>> And this new Envision program is estimating, right now before they've done any intakes, about 6,000 homes. So, you add 7,000 to 6,000, you get 13,000. That still leaves a gap of 10,000 homes. Now, we know some folks will be able to take care of themselves. Some got insurance money. Some got friends, family, neighbors, and everybody else, but there's still a big chunk of homes on this island and throughout the territory that are gonna need assistance.
>> Mm-hmm.
>> And that's where, if you're a local volunteer and you can come partner with some of our volunteer labor...
>> Mm-hmm.
>> Um, we got a lot of work to do.
>> Right.

>> It's -- It's disheartening when you think about how slow it is.

It's really disheartening. And I think I was just traumatized Wednesday night just knowing how many folks...

>> Right.

>> Were really suffering through that.

I have a roof over my house, and that's a huge difference, and... You make me start cry.

It's just knowing that I have neighbors that they're getting wet every time it rains.

Sleeping under a tarp, whose children are sleeping under a tarp, who might still have mold. You know, the health effects. You know, all the people that have been breathing in this mold for so long.

The long term effects of that are gonna be devastating.

We have to do more, and we have to come together as a community. I can do my best to bring in outsiders to help us...

>> Mm-hmm.

>> ...but we got to walk hand-in-hand with the folks that are here to help.

>> Unity of community.

>> Unity of community.

>> I like that.

>> So, again, if somebody needs to offer their services or is seeking help, what are the numbers that they should call?

>> Sure, the number to call, if you're still seeking help, is the hotline, and that is 340-473-5305.

And then, if you want to volunteer, you can visit our website, which is www.stxltrg.org, or you can call our office at 340-713-4440.

>> And the Long Term Recovery Group meets every other Monday, correct?

>> We meet every other Monday. Normally we would meet this

coming Monday, but, since I'm gonna be at this conference, we aren't meeting.

So our next meeting is May 20th from 3:00 to 5:00 at the St. Croix Christian Church behind Pueblo.

>> Okay.

And, during the break, we were talking about your committee. Communication.

>> The committee of two.

>> Oh, my.

>> Yes, before I was hired as executive director, I was a part of the LTRG through the Episcopal Diocese, and I was the chair of the Communications Committee, and then once I was hired, I was really supposed to release that chairmanship over to someone else, but I've been a little busy, so we haven't quite turned that over or really constituted that committee, so, primarily, you know, our other committees are fantastic at doing their promotion.

Hopefully you've seen our youth opportunity fair fliers around. I think every child in a public school got a flier.

>> Oh, good.

>> And, you know, they designed this, and they distributed.

I come on the radio any time anybody will have me.

We've got our Facebook page and then our website, so the committee of two is doing what we can.

>> You say you distribute to public schools.

What about private schools?

>> They may have gone to the private schools also.

>> Oh, okay, good, good.

>> Yeah, we really try to...

>> Everybody.

>> ...disseminate everybody.

>> Okay.

>> Cast a wide net.

>> Okay, good.

The Youth Committee, also, maybe

a couple weeks ago -- if you noticed a lot of our youth wearing new headbands?

>> No.

What's on these headbands?

>> I think our Youth Committee has started a new fashion trend at St. Croix.

We got a container of donated school supplies that the Youth Committee then broke up the container and distributed to most of the public schools and I think a couple of the private schools, also.

>> Okay.

>> But within the school supplies, they sent a whole thing of headbands, and so I think every child on this island got one, maybe two, maybe three headbands.

The problem with donated goods is folks tell you what they send, and then sometimes they don't send just what they say they're sending.

>> Yeah.

>> So, I'm sure we'll even have some headbands tomorrow at the Youth Opportunity Fair if anybody misses out.

>> So, at this Youth Opportunity Fair, tell us again where that's going to be.

>> Sure, that's tomorrow at the Sonnai Isles Amphitheater from 1:00 to 4:00, and, again, that's a free event.

Children of all ages are welcome.

We have resources available for children of any age, pretty much.

Maybe not five and under.

>> Okay.

>> Five and under's so cute, just bring them anyway.

>> And like I said, we'll have live performances.

We have over, I think close to 30 vendors.

>> Oh, wow.

>> Organizations that have

opportunities for youth.
FEMA will be there talking about
disaster preparedness and what
youth can do.

And, um...

>> Okay, good.

I mean, you mentioned something
about music?

>> Yes.

>> Okay.

>> We have live performances.

>> Alright.

We're gonna take another break,
and we'll be right back.

You're listening to Ability
Radio.

>> And try to find peace within
without stepping on one another

>> I never know when...

>> And try to find peace within
without stepping on one another

Remember you all have mothers

>> Now's the time for all good
men to get together with one
another

We got to iron out our problems
and iron out our quarrels and
try to live as brothers

And try to find peace within
without stepping on one another

>> We're back.

You're listening to Ability
Radio.

This program is sponsored by the
Disability Rights Center of the
Virgin Islands, and, again, if
you've missed any portion, it
will be posted on our website at
drcvi.org, and it will be
transcribed.

Our guest today is Jay Rollins,
who is the executive director of
the St. Croix Long Term Recovery
Group, and, Iris, you had
another question.

>> Well, I think that it's
really important to stress,
again -- know we've been talking
about it during the show --
unity of community and really
try to get some fresh blood like
you need for this, what you're

doing, 'cause it's a humongous, wonderful job that, you know, you guys are doing, and maybe I'll volunteer myself.

>> Fantastic.

>> Okay?

>> I would love that.

>> If you could just, you know, tell the community how important it is for us to continue volunteering for this, 'cause, like you said, we're gonna have more storms, and they're gonna be deadlier than what we experienced.

>> There are so many ways to volunteer.

I think people use the word "volunteer" sometimes, and, especially in recovery, they think, "Okay, well, I got to get up on a roof."

Not necessarily.

>> Not necessarily.

>> You can volunteer by coming to a meeting and getting correct and accurate information and helping to disseminate that to your neighbors.

That's a volunteer opportunity.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> And you're gonna have factual information.

What we've seen throughout this recovery process is just the amount of misinformation that's been given.

>> Yeah.

>> And part of it was because of how, especially with the housing programs, they were initially set up, and then they changed.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> And there was a real sort of lack of messaging as folks were going through that process. So, we can help with that, because we're in the room with those folks, and, like I said, we're gonna go right to the source for the information, rather than relying on second and third hand.

So, that's... One of the biggest ways you can volunteer is to come get accurate information.

>> Right.

>> And our meetings are open to anybody, unlike other meetings where you won't be able to get in the door.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> Right.

>> You can get in the door for our meetings, and we're gonna share all the information that we have.

So, just think about "volunteer" as levels.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> What asset do you have?

What's something that you're passionate about, and how can you apply that...

>> Mm-hmm.

>> ...to this recovery process? So it doesn't have to be outside of your comfort zone.

>> Right.

>> It could be something that you love to do anyway.

If you love to garden...

>> Mm-hmm.

>> There may be an opportunity as we're looking at these sustainable farms.

There may be ways for you to connect your passion for gardening to something that will help us in the long run.

So, you know, again, don't let the word "volunteer" throw you off.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> Think about what you're already doing and how you may be able to increase that.

>> Right.

>> That's a very nice way to put it, actually.

>> Yeah.

>> Yeah.

>> Um, obviously, there's needs for people with, you know, building skills and gardening skills and, you know, clerical skills.

>> Mm-hmm.
>> Grant writing skills.
>> If there are any grant writers listening, yes.
>> You know, that's a huge task in and of itself.
>> Absolutely.
>> And the reporting requirements and all that good stuff.
What are some other disciplines? And, again, I like what you said that, you know, look within yourself.
See what you can bring to the table, and it could be something like you say, as simple as transferring accurate information.
What are some other things that you find that, you know, the Long Term Recovery Group would benefit from, skill sets?
We could benefit from new ideas. We've had the same dedicated core group of volunteers, like I said, since the beginning, and we want to make sure that we're not losing touch.
So, just to have someone with fresh perspective that we may say, "Hey, we think we should do this this way," and someone new that hasn't been in this can say, "Well, that doesn't make a lot of sense, guys," you know?
>> A young person will say, "That sucks."
>> Yeah.
>> And we can say, "Oh, you're right, thank you."
>> Mm-hmm.
>> So, you know, it's fresh ideas.
It's fresh perspective.
It's renewed energy, because recovery process is so long.
Just to have a new compatriot, and, you know, it's like someone else to offer a hug.
And, again, you know, if you think about layers of volunteer and breaking that word down, we could certainly use that.

So, we can use all disciplines.
We will figure out a way to make
your creative talents work.

>> Have you had much
participation, say, for example,
from the health field?

I'm just kind of making it very
broad.

>> We have.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> And we've had some great
island therapy.

I'm gonna say the name wrong.

>> No.

>> Okay.

Pshew.

I haven't had much coffee yet.
We've had a great partner in
them, and we've been able to
bring in some health partners
from outside, also.

>> Thank you so much.

This has been a wonderful show.
It's been a lot of information,
and we hope to have you back.

>> Thank you so much for having
me.

>> Thank you so much for
listening, Virgin Islands.

Iris?

>> Always a pleasure.

>> Always, always.

>> Take care.

Have a good weekend.

>> And do respect the women of
the world

Remember you all have mothers
We got to make this land a
better land than the world in
which we live

And we got to help