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RT Park STEM Demand Surges as UVI Moves to Commercialize Research and Launches Free EV Fast Charger

RTPark's after-school STEM enrollment grew 95 to 356 students, summer camp registration filled in minutes on St. Croix and St. Thomas, and officials are preparing agreements to commercialize UVI research and operate the VI's first Level 3 DC EV charger.

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Janeka Simon **May 29, 2026**

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The RTPark facility located on the University of the Virgin Islands campus on St. Croix, serving as a hub for innovation, entrepreneurship, and technology development in the territory.

The University of the Virgin Islands Research and Technology Park is seeing sharply increased demand for its youth STEM programming while moving forward with a new effort to help local researchers commercialize their work and generate business opportunities from academic innovation.

During a meeting on Thursday, RT Park Executive Director Eric Sonnier told board members that the organization's after-school STEM program, which concluded its term on April 24, is now offered in 14 public elementary and middle schools across the territory. Enrollment has grown from 95 participants in fiscal year 2025 to 356 in fiscal year 2026, nearly quadrupling in one year.

Mr. Sonnier also reported strong demand for RT Park's upcoming summer youth camps. Registration opened on April 17, and "it's amazing to be able to say that registration was filled for St. Croix and St. Thomas within three minutes," he told board members.

The rapid registration, he said, shows the program's popularity but also highlights the need to expand capacity.

"That's the challenge for next year...how do we continue to increase the number of students that participate in our summer camp," Mr. Sonnier said.

The summer programming has also drawn interest from funders. Mr. Sonnier disclosed that \$60,000 in sponsorship has already been committed, "and potentially another twenty to thirty thousands that we're still working on."

Alongside the youth programming expansion, RT Park is advancing an initiative to commercialize academic research at UVI. The effort is intended to help turn local research and innovation into viable, revenue-generating business opportunities.

"This is an initiative that we discussed as a board quite a few times," Mr. Sonnier said, noting that officials are now pursuing the idea more directly.

To help navigate regulatory and legal requirements, RT Park has secured the services of "an attorney who specializes in intellectual property and patent litigation," Mr. Sonnier said.

"He's been helping us prepare the right documentation and agreements and contracts to have in place for not only the university but the RT Park faculty and staff," he continued.

"We're deep in that process," Mr. Sonnier told board members. Draft documents have already been submitted for review, pending final authorization from UVI President Safiya George.

Mr. Sonnier also announced that the electric vehicle fast-charging station installed at RT Park is now fully operational.

"It's the first and only Level 3 DC electric vehicle charging station in the territory," he said. "We're working on different rules and guidelines for usage of our EV charger, but that's free to the public for the next year."

After May 2027, the charger is expected to become a revenue-generating asset for RT Park.