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University of the Virgin Islands Breaks Ground on New Nursing School Facility at St. Croix Campus

Federal Support and Local Investment: The role of eased debt burdens for HBCUs and territorial support in realizing the nursing school project

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UVI nursing students attend the groundbreaking ceremony for the new School of Nursing facility at the Albert A. Sheen Campus, Monday, November 13, 2023. By. MEDIA ONE/UVI

Triumph and jubilation were the themes of the day at Monday's groundbreaking ceremony for a new nursing school at the University of the Virgin Islands' St. Croix campus.

Surrounded by pleased officials of the executive and legislative branch, UVI faculty and staff, led by President Dr. David Hall, celebrated the momentous achievement for the future of nursing in the territory. "Behind you, in months to come, will come out of the earth a facility that will train not only our existing nurses, but will train nurses into the future," Mr. Hall told the ceremony's guests.

He explained that federal legislation signed by the previous administration, which eased the debt burdens of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) across the country, helped create significant financial space for UVI. Instead of clawing some of that financing back like other states, Mr. Hall explained that the Legislature and executive branch in the Virgin Islands agreed that the university could instead invest in strengthening the institution. One such project Mr. Hall said he promised Governor Bryan was a new school of nursing facility.

"If the advocacy on the federal level didn't occur, and the support on the local level didn't occur, this day would not be here," Mr. Hall remarked, highlighting the power of cooperation between different levels and branches of government, as well as non-governmental institutions.

The nursing school, the UVI president noted, is being built next to the university's cutting edge medical simulation center so that nursing students will also be able to take full advantage of the technology contained within. "We want in the future for our medical students and our nursing students to be trained together," he said, explaining that "the future of healthcare is one of teams working together to provide the best care for human beings possible."

Architect Renee D'Adamo and contractor D. S. & R Construction, LLC were both praised for their eagerness to get started on the project, with Mr. Hall joking that they "beat us to the ceremony," having already begun preliminary work on the site ahead of the groundbreaking. That, he said, exemplified the commitment all stakeholders have to ensuring the successful completion of the 18-month project.

V.I. Department of Health Justa Encarnacion, a UVI alumna herself as well as a former director of Health Services at UVI, was overjoyed to be able to witness the groundbreaking. "From the time the email was sent to me, I've been smiling," she disclosed. Directing her remarks to the nursing students in the audience, she encouraged them to concentrate on their core nursing training but also to widen their perspective about the roles a nurse can perform.

"You can do anything as a nurse," Ms. Encarnacion declared, reminding the audience that besides herself, there have been two previous commissioners of health that came from the territory's nursing ranks. The new facility, the health commissioner said, will only serve to strengthen the already-excellent education and training provided by UVI, ensuring generations of highly skilled nursing professionals in years to come.

Former senator Kurt Vialet, who was praised for his instrumental support in ensuring that funds and financing for the project were in place on the part of the Legislature, praised the territory's nursing students for their diligence and tradition of excellent performance at licensing examinations. He said that the establishment of a nursing school facility on St. Croix will only serve to strengthen the territory's cohort of nurses, which will itself serve to improve and enhance the island's healthcare delivery.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach, representing Government House, tied the new nursing school to the healthcare transformation that is occurring across the territory, including recent groundbreaking ceremonies for the Charlotte Kimelman Cancer Institute and the Cardiac Center at the Juan F Luis hospital. He expressed optimism that the new healthcare facilities plus

the new nursing school facility will place the territory in a good position to address "the health needs of the people of the Virgin Islands, as well as the health needs of our neighbors in the Caribbean."

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