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UVI to Honor Two Trailblazing Alumnae with Prestigious Honorary Degrees

Retired Brigadier General Deborah Y. Francis Howell and Brigadier General Sally F. Petty to receive honorary Doctor of Humane Letters for their exceptional leadership, profound community service, and enduring contributions to the Virgin Islands.

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From Retired Brigadier General Deborah Y. Francis Howell and Brigadier General Sally F. Petty. left to right, By. THE UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS.

The University of the Virgin Islands announced on Tuesday that it will award honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degrees to two distinguished alumnae, recognizing their outstanding service and significant contributions to the territory. The honors will be presented during UVI's 61st

Commencement Ceremonies scheduled for May 2025.

Retired Brigadier General Deborah Y. Francis Howell and Brigadier General Sally F. Petty will be celebrated at separate ceremonies. General Howell's honorary degree presentation is set for Thursday, May 15, at 1 p.m. on the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix, while General Petty's recognition will follow the next day, Friday, May 16, at 1 p.m. at the Elridge W. Blake Sports and Fitness Center on the Orville E. Kean Campus on St. Thomas.

General Howell, a pioneering figure in the Virgin Islands National Guard, was notably the first woman appointed as Adjutant General of the Virgin Islands, capping a distinguished 36-year military career. During the Territory's challenging recovery period following Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, her leadership was instrumental. General Howell, a proud UVI graduate, earned her Associate of Arts and Bachelor of Arts in Business from the university before pursuing a Master of Science in Management at Central Michigan University. Her extensive military education, characterized by top-ten percentile achievements, and attendance at elite military institutions, have earned her multiple honors and awards.

Beyond her military career, General Howell has significantly contributed to government and community efforts. She notably served as District Governor of Rotary District 7020, organizing a significant regional conference on St. Croix that greatly benefitted the local economy. Active in several community groups, including Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., the American Legion, Bethel Methodist Church, and the Rotary Club of St. Croix West—serving twice as president—General Howell embodies committed civic engagement.

Similarly dedicated to leadership, Brigadier General Sally F. Petty has influenced generations through her dual roles in education and military service. An educator for over three decades, General Petty currently serves as Principal of Ivanna Eudora Kean High School, where her leadership fosters academic achievement, student success, and community partnerships. Her academic credentials include a Bachelor of Science in History from Norfolk State University, two master's degrees from UVI and Air War College, and completion of the prestigious Harvard Kennedy School of Government's Executive Education in Leadership in Homeland Security.

General Petty's distinguished military career, beginning in 1989, includes her current position as Assistant Adjutant General of the Virgin Islands Army National Guard. She has earned numerous accolades, including the Legion of Merit (2nd Award), Bronze Star Medal, and Meritorious Service Medal, symbolizing her dedication and exemplary performance in defense and education.

UVI President Dr. Safiya George emphasized the significance of recognizing these exceptional leaders, stating, "We are proud to honor these two remarkable women and UVI alumnae whose lives exemplify the highest ideals of leadership, courage, and service. Their accomplishments are an inspiration to our students and to the entire Virgin Islands community."