

The Virgin Islands Consortium

8 Graduate From Netwave Unlimited's Fiber Installation Course

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With the Virgin Islands economy faltering, the ongoing trend has been to move away and search for a better life on the U.S. mainland. It goes without saying that the migration from the territory to elsewhere has been high since the shuttering of HOVENSA in 2012.

But, what about those who choose to remain local and fight the tide--are there any opportunities for them? The answer is yes. If one looks closely enough, he'll find that there are chances for advancement all the time in the Virgin Islands, but because they are not found in the traditional settings, these opportunities often remain clandestine.

This has been the case with Netwave Unlimited Services, LLC, a company that teaches its students to become professional fiber installers in an intensive, one-month course. The company, at the Juan F. Luis Cardiac Center on November 18, graduated eight new students, who are now skilled to take on the challenges of an industry that is set to explode in the territory. Only this time, the owners of the company, and those who support their efforts, want the world to know about it.

At the ceremony on Saturday night, the graduates heard congratulatory remarks from elected officials and respected persons in the St. Croix community, as well as words of admonition that they should never stop learning.

"No matter where you are [and] how much training and education you have, when you graduate from something it means that you've gone to the next level," said Semaj Johnson, Netwave's director of community development and public relations, who organized the event. "You've acquired the skill, you've met with people, you've interacted something new."



New graduates of Netwave Unlimited

Services, LLC.

Senator Nereida "Nellie" Rivera-O'Reilly and Dr. Simon B. Jones-Hendrickson also spoke at the event, encouraging the new graduates to keep pursuing their dreams. Former Sen. Juan Figueroa-Serville called in and expressed his well wishes to the graduates, as he was unable to attend in person. The Cardiac Center was filled with proud family members and friends of the new graduates, which included the two sons of Sen. Rivera-O'Reilly and one female student.

Following the ceremony, *VI Consortium* spoke with company founder Ana Foster, who shared more about the course, its importance to the Virgin Islands emerging economy of fiber installation, the cost of entry, and why she believes everyone should know about her company.

Foster said Netwave was founded in January 2014 and have held three graduation ceremonies so far. She said she wants to keep the courses in cycles of three. Her business idea came about when Foster realized the territory had some of the best fiber technology in the world, and firms such as Global Crossing and government-owned VINGN, which provides fiber capability to local internet IT service providers, started seeing greater numbers of smaller companies sign up with them to provide services to local consumers. Foster said if the Virgin Islands do not have trained workers to fill the new jobs, these companies will have no choice but to gather a workforce from outside, something she said Netwave Unlimited Services is aiming to prevent.

"We have a lot of talent in the VI, and we really need to work with [them], so that's when we sat down with Johnson, and of course the Dept. of Labor with Commissioner Bryan, and with Senator Sanes and Senator Malone, and we started discussing how we'd make this a reality," Foster said.

Apart from anyone being able to sign up with no prior experience, Netwave Unlimited is also a Dept. of Labor provider, and many graduates joined the course through the department's initiatives. The fee to participate in the one-month course is \$3,800; however, it is fully funded by the Dept. of Labor.



Senator "Nellie" Rivera-O'Reilly speaks at

Netwave Unlimited Services graduation.

In terms of certification, Netwave Unlimited is connected to Fiber Optic International, an organization formed in 1995 under the name ACES Int'l. [On its website](#), Fiber Optics International says it provides a path "to nationally certify fiber optic installers."

Foster said Netwave Unlimited would rather keep classes at 15 maximum, "because we really have to dedicate a lot of time to each of the students, and I have my team, [so] we can really work with these students individually," she said.

Foster went on, adding that her company's fiber optic installation course "gives an opportunity to people who are not able to go to college to come and train for one of the careers of the future." She said enrollees would need at least a high school diploma or GED to qualify for the course.

The graduates will cross paths with a lot of opportunities in the fiber optic field, Foster said, because the industry is broad. She said Netwave Unlimited has already partnered with local firms and is currently building new relationships in order to solidify its hold in the industry, while creating more opportunities for its graduates.

With only 30 days to train and graduate with a certificate deeming one fit for fiber optic installation, the course, Foster said, is very intense and includes written lessons as well as hands-on application. So far, eight graduates have found employment with various communications companies in the territory--three with VINGN and the rest with Innovative, Choice and Broadband, Foster said.

By the time the evening came to an end, families had celebrated their loved ones' new-found skill, making their chances better at succeeding in an ever-changing world and an already-difficult economy on St. Croix. And that's what Foster longs for: A Virgin Islands where its people take the lead in filling positions that require new skills. And from the

looks of it, Netwave Unlimited Services, LLC, is well on its way to ensuring that happens.
For more about Netwave Unlimited, visit the company's website [here](#).

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