

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI Launches Construction Of School Of Medicine Facilities With Groundbreaking Ceremony

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ST. THOMAS -- The University of the Virgin Islands held a groundbreaking ceremony today to commemorate the start of the construction of the university's medical facilities, according to a press release UVI issued late Wednesday. The event follows an October, 2015 decision by the Liaison Committee for Medical Education (LCME) Advisory Board not to grant preliminary accreditation to the UVI School of Medicine (SOM), citing [multiple areas](#) of insufficient progress towards compliance. UVI said it would [reapply for accreditation status](#) in August, 2016.

Even so, Virgin Islands leaders, UVI administrators, faculty, staff and the medical community attended the Medical School Classroom Building groundbreaking on March 2,

on the St. Thomas Campus, which is the first of two ceremonies scheduled.

A similar ceremony will be held for the Medical School Simulation Center on March 3, on the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix.

"The University leadership team for the Medical School project has been working extremely hard to bring this dream into reality," said UVI President David Hall. "Our re-application process is fully underway and we plan to reapply for Liaison Committee for Medical Education preliminary accreditation by Aug. 1. Our goal is to open the Medical School in July 2017."

"The groundbreaking ceremonies serve as an important stage in the development of this transformative project," Dr. Hall said. "They are a collective statement by the University, the Board of Trustees, the Legislature, Governor Mapp, FirstBank, the Foundation of the University of the Virgin Islands, U.S. Department of Education Historically Black Colleges and Universities Loan Program, and various individual supporters that this project is something to which we are all still deeply committed, and plan to work hard to bring into reality."

"Health is the wealth of a nation," said Dr. Simon Jones-Hendrickson, chief economic and fiscal policy advisor, who spoke at the ceremony on behalf of the Office of Governor. "The development of this SOM is going to ensure that we can revolutionize the healthcare delivery here in the U.S. Virgin Islands and the wider Caribbean."

"This is a pivotal movement," he said. "We are shifting and moving the Virgin Islands to a level that it ought to be because of the tremendous amount of possibilities in the Virgin Islands."

Senate President Neville James and other members of the 31st Legislature attended Wednesday's ceremony. "You measure risk by the size of the reward," said Mr. James, who encouraged others in the community to support the SOM, which is expected to be the first accredited English speaking school in the Caribbean.

UVI Board Chairman Henry Smock and James Tunick, vice chairman for the Board of the Foundation of the University of the Virgin Islands, attended today's ceremony and spoke in support of the endeavor. "Having an accredited Medical School in the Virgin Islands is going to truly be a game changer," said Mr. Tunick.

Medical, academic and Virgin Islands community leaders donned hardhats and held shovels to commemorate the start of construction for the SOM, but also took turns pounding a stake in the ground, to symbolize the faith and commitment that UVI has placed in the fertile soil and soul of the University.

"This Classroom Building on St. Thomas and the Simulation Center on St. Croix are stakes in the ground of our future which when realized will improve the quality of health care and create more economic prosperity for the people of the Virgin Islands," said Dr. Hall.

"The classroom building and the simulation center will be the key places where the future physicians for the Virgin Islands will be trained," he said. "The medical school project will not only improve the quality of health care in the Virgin Islands, but will serve as an

economic catalyst for growth and diversification in the territory.”

SOM Dean Dr. Benjamin Sachs said the School's mission is to incorporate advances in pedagogy so that graduates will be life-long learners, solution finders, team players and educators. “We have set out to build a very different type of medical school,” he said. “One that we believe will train physicians to be better able to meet the needs of the people of the US Virgin Islands and the wider Caribbean. We also believe that the School of Medicine can become a national role model for high quality, innovative, and cost-effective medical education.”

School of Medicine Personnel

Dr. Sachs introduced SOM faculty, staff and administrators at the ceremony. Dr. Gwen Moolenaar will serve as an associate dean in the SOM. Dr. Moolenaar, former UVI provost, vice president of Institutional Advancement and Sponsored Programs, is the first black woman in the United States to earn a doctorate in neurophysiology from Indiana University in 1972. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in biology from the College of Saint Elizabeth in 1962 and was awarded a teaching fellowship at Long Island University, from which she received a Master of Arts Degree in biology in 1967.

Other School of Medicine personnel include:

- Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs Dr. Thelma Watson
- Associate Dean for Student Affairs and Admissions Dr. Lori Thompson
- Medical Sciences Chair Dr. Donna Nemeth

Ø Clinical Chairs for St. Thomas:

- Dr. Jessica Wilson
- Dr. Gilbert Comissiong
- Dr. Debra Wright-Frances

Ø Clinical Chairs for St. Croix:

- Dr. Shavel Karel
- Dr. Michelle Dizon
- Dr. Dante Galiber

Scholarship Program Announcement

Victor Santiago, FirstBank Eastern Caribbean Region Business director, announced the development of the FirstBank Cares Scholarship Fund for local students. The fund will award a \$32,000 scholarship for one year of full-time study with the option of renewal for \$128,000 over a four year period.

“FirstBank is honored to be a part of this historic endeavor and wholeheartedly support the University in their effort to develop and sustain a medical school in the territory,” said Santiago. “Through this partnership, we are excited to open the door of opportunity for our local youth to receive a high quality education at what we know will be one of the leading medical school establishments in the Caribbean.”

St. Thomas Classroom Building

The UVI Medical School Classroom Building will be situated adjacent to the Eastern Caribbean Center, overlooking the Herman E. Moore Golf Course, located on the St. Thomas Campus. The over 33,000 square foot, two-story building, will house seminar rooms, a 100-seat lecture hall, library, anatomy/physiology and clinical skill labs, and administration space. Classrooms, lecture halls, conference rooms and seminar rooms will feature smart classroom technology. The anatomy lab will feature a Anatomage Table for anatomy education using technologically advanced visualization. The Anatomage Table is sufficient to cover the full anatomy class. High accuracy and rich contents offer an excellent replacement to traditional cadaver based dissection. Since the data preserves the real life patient color and shape, the table is more effective than embalmed cadavers.

The building's contemporary design will utilize traditional native stone and cypress wood found throughout the campus, paying homage to the history of the university, while looking to the future. Construction is expected to be completed in March 2017.

St. Croix Simulation Center

The Medical School Simulation Center will be constructed just past the main entrance at the northern end of the Sheen Campus. The one-story 21,332 square foot structure, will consist of surgical skills labs, simulation rooms, a 70-seat lecture hall, conference space, a dining hall and administrative offices. These state-of-the art spaces will provide an active learning environment for medical students and visiting physicians. The conference room and lecture hall will feature Smart Classroom Technology. Traditional native stone and cypress wood create a unique identity for the building and a University-wide language that ties the campuses together.

"It has been my privilege to spend my career in academic medicine," said Dr. Sachs, who spent the majority of his academic career at Harvard University and at Tulane University after Hurricane Katrina. "I fundamentally believe that the UVI School of Medicine is a once in a lifetime opportunity for the territory to train the next generation of physicians."

These physicians will help to improve the level of care in the territory and have a significant economic impact, he said.

According to a May 2015 SOM Economic Impact Study, the annual economic impact of the UVI School of Medicine's Simulation Center, when fully operational, will be approximately \$30 million. The SOM Classroom Building will have an economic impact of an estimated \$30 million.

Sachs is excited about the possibility that UVI, as a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), will establish a medical school outside of the mainland United States. Of the 106 HBCUs in the U.S. only three have medical schools. The UVI SOM would be the first new HBCU medical school in over three decades.

The vision of the UVI SOM is to improve the health care of the people of the territory and wider Caribbean community and to address pressing national and international health issues in support of the global community, according to the release. The SOM will adopt a proven curriculum and assessment tool through a collaboration agreement with the

University of Central Florida.

The UVI SOM's goal is to open in 2017. The SOM has received support from Gov. Kenneth Mapp, the VI Senate, the LCME, FirstBank VI, the Foundation of the University of the Virgin Islands (FUVI), the Historically Black Colleges and University's Loan Program, and Dr. Chirinjeev Kathuria, who pledged a \$30 Million gift to the SOM, UVI said.

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