

The Virgin Islands Consortium

We Made It: Raw Emotion And Sense Of Completion Mark Nursing Ceremony At U.V.I.

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ST. CROIX -- As the five nurses who graduated with associate of science in nursing (ASN) degrees took the sacred oath of commitment and recited the Florence Nightingale pledge on Wednesday, there was something remarkably rewarding about the moment: They had endured years of sleepless nights, sacrificed much of their social life, family members, too, had given a lot to see their loved ones make it to this point, and there they were with candles lit, one big step closer to achieving their long sought-after dream. Above right, Geraldine Lockhart, one of yesterday's graduates, is pinned by Delarie Lewis-Thomas.

The setting, as is almost always the case with such ceremonies, was intimate. Family and friends were gathered at the U.V.I. campus here, in the Great Hall -- some who had mentous occasion.



Nurses held lit candles as they prepared to

recite the Florence Nightingale pledge.

Traditional protocols were followed, including procession of nurses, invocation, welcome and other expected norms. Guest speaker Mrs. Lewis-Thomas, a nurse herself, delivered a touching talk that sought to encourage the new nurses to keep the best attitude in all circumstances. One of her most powerful lines to the nurses was a famous quote by Maya Angelou: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

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But it was the nurses' remarks that accentuated the importance of yesterday's achievement. Some of the five ladies -- Cadira Philip, Mrs. Lockhart, Valine JnBaptiste, Sonja Acosta and Shereen Bando -- became emotional to the point of tears yesterday, overwhelmed with the joy of being able to arrive at this point after such grueling classes. And they constantly spoke highly of the ones closest to them, fully aware that the sacrifices of those people had played a key role in the realization of yesterday's



New nurses, the program's Dean of Nursing

Dr. Beverley Anne Lansiquot, left, along with professors, at UVI's pinning ceremony on Wednesday.

"I feel wonderful, the road is finally over. This journey has been crazy and I'm glad it's over," said Ms. Philip. She described U.V.I.'s nursing program as "one of the hardest things on planet earth," an assessment that U.V.I. Professor Desiree Bertrand agreed

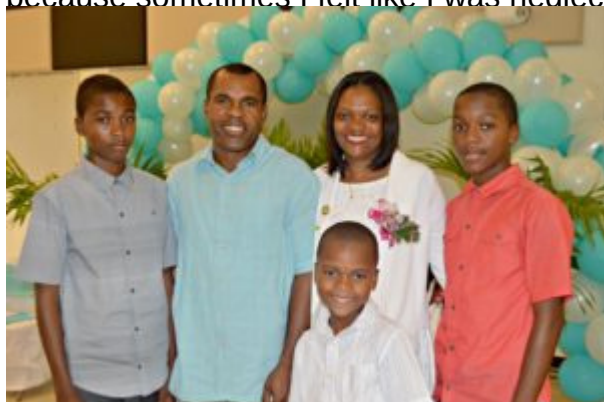
with.

"It is challenging, that's the word I like to use," said Mrs. Bertrand, who has taught at the university since 2002. "And of course we expect to be. They're taking care of people, people's lives are in their hands, so we have to make sure that the standard is up to par and ready to go."

For Mrs. Bertrand, the most rewarding feeling as a professor is meeting graduates in the community, seeing them in various doctors' offices, as they take care of residents -- including Mrs. Bertrand and her children. "It's also a good feeling to see how welcoming and open they are to other students who are coming behind them, offering that same kind of love and help to guide them through their nursing education. Lovely."

For graduate Sonja Acosta, the most rewarding feeling was the accomplishment of achievement.

"The most challenging thing has been being a mother and being very dedicated to school because sometimes I felt like I was neglecting my children; and felt guilty about it.



today, and I've done it for them."

Geraldine Lockhart, along with her husband

Marcellin Lockhart and three children at Wednesday's pinning ceremony.

Mrs. Lockhart, whose parents had traveled from Dominica as a show of their delight, and her husband and children, who sat proudly as Mrs. Lockhart spoke, sang and shared her heart, described the pinning ceremony as an experience she will never forget, but a testament to the notion that dedication and hard work pay off, and one's belief in God, His strength and unfailing love as key factors to finding success in life's endeavors. Of her husband, Mrs. Lockhart highlighted his dedication to their family and her dream, bearing the added pressures that come with a wife whose priorities, momentarily, had shifted to the painstaking pursuit of a nursing education. The moment was all the more special with her parents sitting in the audience, who she also thanked for being a reliable rock.

"Most of all I want to thank the almighty God, for without him I would not be here. I would always remember that verse from Nehemiah 2:20, 'Your presence will be with me throughout,'" Mrs. Lockhart said. "And I also meditated on 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your path.'"

Before the nurses could actually work at medical facilities in their new capacity, they must take and pass the NCLEX exam, which is held at U.V.I.'s St. Thomas campus. From

there, they could either continue with school or work at any hospital of their choosing.

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