

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Croix And St. Thomas-St. John Chambers of Commerce Endorse UVI School Of Medicine

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This spring, the Board of Directors of both the St. Croix and St. Thomas-St. John Chambers of Commerce announced their full support for the University of the Virgin Islands School of Medicine (SOM). The St. Croix Chamber of Commerce announced their support in April, while the Board of Directors of the St. Thomas-St. John Chamber of Commerce unanimously voted to support the SOM in May 2016.

Although the school faced a major roadblock when it was [denied accreditation in October](#), UVI President Dr. David Hall has vowed to resubmit accreditation documents, with the "hope," he said, of gaining approval. As the university's efforts would be near worthless without accreditation, it is paramount that Dr. Hall's "hope" turns into reality.

He [told The Consortium](#) during the simulation center's groundbreaking ceremony on St. Croix in March that he could not guarantee accreditation from the Liaison Committee for Medical Education (L.C.M.E.) Advisory Board, which the school would need before opening. He said the school would reapply for accreditation in August of this year, but the decision was made to move forward with construction because the aim is to open the medical school in July, 2017, and final accreditation approval, if granted, would not come until February, 2017.

A major part of receiving accreditation, Dr. Hall went on, was proving to the L.C.M.E. that appropriate funding was in place. He said while monies for construction of both facilities had been secured, funding to keep the facilities running was indelible to success, and said he would continue soliciting community leaders and those with the wherewithal to invest in the school. Dr. Hall added that he was "very confident" accreditation would more than likely be granted if \$10 million could be raised. The reason for this, he explained, is because the L.C.M.E. board does not view tuition on its own as a viable source of financial stability.

And Dr. Hall said he wasn't concerned that a bill seeking to raise U.V.I.'s yearly debt service from \$700,000 to \$1 million [was vetoed](#) by Governor Kenneth Mapp in October, 2015. He said subsequent conversations with Mr. Mapp had produced positive results, and he expects the governor to reverse that decision in favor of raising the limit, which Dr. Hall noted was another critical component for success.

Construction for the UVI SOM has begun on the St. Thomas Campus, with construction on the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix expected to begin shortly. The SOM is expected to enroll its first medical students in Fall 2017. The annual economic impact of the fully operational UVI School of Medicine's Simulation Center, which will be constructed on the Sheen Campus, will be approximately \$30 million, according to a May 2015 SOM Economic Impact Study. The SOM Classroom Building, which will be housed on the St. Thomas Campus, will have an economic impact of an estimated \$30 million.

"The St. Croix Chamber of Commerce applauds this forward-thinking vision that will not only train the next generation of physicians for the territory and the wider Caribbean, but will also elevate the level of care for the people of the Virgin Islands while growing the economy of St. Croix," according to a St. Croix Chamber of Commerce statement. "We look forward to it becoming a reality and encourage the support of the community of this endeavor."

"Healthcare has been a major concern for most Americans in recent years, and Virgin Islanders have not been immune from the realities of rising costs, shortages of doctors and nurses, and the scarcity of available and reasonable insurance plans," said Chamber of Commerce Board President Sebastiano Paiewonsky-Cassinelli.

"As representatives of the business community, we fully believe that the development of an accredited medical school in the Virgin Islands will help our residents in many of these areas, especially by providing more qualified doctors to our two hospitals and affiliated clinics, upgrading the quality of available clinical services, and helping eliminate many of the disparities found in current health care systems," he added.

“The support of the Chamber of Commerce’s of all three islands is a ringing endorsement of the benefits of the medical school project,” said UVI President David Hall. “We hope that the endorsement of the leaders of the business community will serve as a catalyst for others to support this transformative idea through gifts and donations. It will take the entire community to make this important project a reality.” Dr. Hall continued, “I personally want to thank the leaders of both Chambers for their endorsement and for their vision.”

“I thank the St. Croix and St. Thomas-St. John Chambers of Commerce for their support for the UVI School of Medicine,” said SOM Dean Dr. Benjamin Sachs. “I fundamentally believe that the University’s School of Medicine is a once in a lifetime opportunity for the territory to train the next generation of physicians. In addition to training medical and nursing students, the simulation center will offer continuing medical education training for physicians, first responders, nurses, and other allied health professionals continuing education opportunities.”

Paiewonsky-Cassinelli said that one advantage that the School of Medicine at UVI will have is that it is eligible for accreditation by the Liaison Committee for Medical Education, which is the accreditation body for medical schools in the United States and Canada. The Committee would extend its authority to the Virgin Islands, making the UVI School of Medicine the first accredited, English-speaking medical school in the region. “This advantage over every other medical school in the Caribbean will ensure our success,” he said. “It also means that our school will maintain the highest standards in medical education, facilities, faculty and staff.”

“The private sector of the Virgin Islands fully understands that a project of this size will have a positive effect on economic development in the territory, and will raise the national and international stature of the Virgin Islands,” said Chamber Vice President Cecile de Jongh.

She provided further details on affiliations that will enhance the reputation of the UVI School of Medicine.

“National partnerships have been established with the University of Central Florida, University of South Florida, and the University of South Florida’s Center for Advanced Medical Learning and Simulation,” de Jongh said. “Along with local partners at the Schneider Regional Medical Center, Governor Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center, and the other fine facilities in the territory, the Medical School will provide an excellent educational and research-based curriculum for future physicians, who will serve this community and many others throughout the world.”

The vision of the UVI SOM is to improve the healthcare of the people in the territory and wider Caribbean community, and to address pressing national and international health issues in support of the global community. UVI held ground breaking ceremonies for the SOM Classroom Building and Simulation Center in March 2016. The University will reapply for preliminary accreditation with the Liaison Committee for Medical Education in August of 2016. The LCME is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as the reliable authority for the accreditation of medical education programs leading to doctor of medicine degrees.

It is estimated that St. Croix will experience an increased need of over 20,000 hotel room nights per year once the center is fully operational. Twenty-five full-time staff and an additional 25 professionals on a part-time basis will be needed to operate the facility.

The mission of the St. Croix Chamber of Commerce is to represent its members and create a positive business climate that fosters private sector growth. Its mission is also to advocate on behalf of the members, governmental policies and legislative actions that encourage investment, promote economic stability, provide opportunities for business growth, and advance a healthy economy in St. Croix.

The St. Thomas-St. John Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to promoting civic and economic growth and the vitality of the community.

Feature Image: From left to right: St. Thomas Classroom building, and St. Croix's Simulation Center (Credit: UVI).