

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Meet Tai Lashley, A Dreamer, Achiever, Walt Disney Manager And Probably Future USVI Governor

Human Interest / **Published On July 19, 2016 09:32 AM /**

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It's as if she lives in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Taiesa Lashley, a well accomplished 28-year-old St. Thomian, who remains as relevant in the territory as she is at Walt Disney, Florida, where she's employed as a catering and events manager.

Her Facebook friends list [hits the maximum of 5,000](#), but it's not based on vain popularity that accompanies the fleeting trends of this age. Her followers watch her for a dose of motivation that exudes from her many exploits. They monitor her to be encouraged by the way she carries herself; a determination to live a life of happiness so intrinsic and unrelenting that it's hard not to be moved into action for your own good.

"Tai is a professional, resilient, ambitious person. I think those words pretty much sum me up. I like to do a lot. I like to stay busy, I like to stay motivated and I love positivity," she told me during a phone interview recently.

If you're a regular to this publication, you would have seen multiple stories about Ms. Lashley's Virgin Islands initiatives. Late last year, she used her influence, along with staunch support from family members in St. Thomas, to collect and deliver over 40 boxes of items to local charities, in an effort dubbed [Project We Care VI](#). In January, Ms. Lashley, through her Virgin Islands Pageantry organization, [teamed up](#) with 4Her Inc. to pamper a lucky high school senior for an exceptional prom experience. And [her latest giveback endeavor](#) included the preparation of care packages delivered to the U.S. Virgin Islands National Guard 786th CS HHC Team, the only unit in the territory currently deployed.

Her story is one of hard work and results borne through dedication. Ms. Lashley studied at [Johnson and Wales University](#) in North Miami, where she majored in hospitality management. A former Miss Virgin Islands World, first runner-up in the St. Thomas 2005 Carnival Queen contest, and most recently represented the territory in the Miss Black U.S. Ambassador, placing third, Tai is a standout individual with greatness in her DNA.

A testament to her determination is the very position she currently holds as a manager at Walt Disney, Florida, which did not come easy. Ms. Lashley, who is also in the Army Reserve, started at Disney with a temporary job in the company's college program and is determined to get a managerial position here and it's not



Taiesha Lashley

She applied and got accepted and worked among youngsters 16 to 18-year-olds. After six months, she applied for internship and then worked her way up.

When she served as a management intern, Ms. Lashley said, "If they were to determine tomorrow that they didn't need me, they could just say, 'hey, this is your last day,' and that's it."

Her job, however, has also afforded Ms. Lashley the opportunity to be the face of veterans, which is tied to her Army career. Two weeks ago, she was [the star of a promotional video](#) published by the "Walt Disney World in the Community", an official Disney Facebook, and was used to highlight veterans employed at the company on July 4.

And her line of work, Ms. Lashley says, is quite out of the ordinary with no standard routine.

"The good thing about my role at Disney is that no two days are alike. But typically I have clients for events and conferences, weddings, receptions -- you name it -- so by the time it gets to me, and they arrive, I'm their events manager," she said. Ms. Lashley is also the liaison between the kitchen and the culinary team, a role that includes ensuring the dietary needs of guests are tended to. "For example if there's someone who's allergic to onions, I would speak to the chef and we would make sure that the guest is taken care of."

Even so, "The freedom of being a leader at Disney is I'm empowered to do whatever to uplift the company, and don't necessarily hold a set time to do things, even though we have a schedule," she said.

Tai said she enlisted in the Army because service is at the core of who she is. She noted her determination to enlist straight out of high school, but that dream was stymied by her mother, who insisted that Ms. Lashley attend college before any such move.

"The day I finished my last exam, I went to the recruiter's office and I told him what I was studying. I told him that I wanted to travel but that I wanted to come back and finish my in the military (civil affairs specialist) and I love



Taiesha Lashley, center left, with participants of

this year's Miss Black U.S. Ambassador in Oklahoma.

Ms. Lashley doesn't mind going to the gun range or not putting on makeup. "I'm a very complex individual and I feel like everything that I do is true to who I am. But I don't like doing one thing for a prolonged period of time. So for me it's like I love Disney but I don't

mind going to drill every month; I love being a pageant girl but after two days of it I'm ready to go the gun range. It's all about balance.

"I choose to pursue things that I'm really passionate about, so even though I'm supposed to be tired and winded, I think the key is if I pursue things that I'm passionate about, even when I'm physically tired, I'll continue doing it because it's something that I enjoy doing."

Ms. Lashley prides herself on being a professional that commands respect from those she comes in contact with. "If I come to you and I ask you to do something, I want you to know that Taiesa Lashley is very respectful and courteous as well as a professional, so when I ask for things to get done, I most likely tend to get a yes, or maybe they'd say, 'I can't do this, but let me get you in contact with the person who could make it happen.'"

And she has no sense of complacency with her current position. For Ms. Lashley, the trajectory shoots up the Disney corporate ladder, with her next goal being to become an ambassador of the company -- a role she has played all her life in the field of pageantry -- and eventually an executive of the sprawling, storied, multi-billion dollar company with arms and influence that stretch around the world in various segments of culture, including media. Walt Disney owns ABC Networks, A&E, ESPN, Marvel and many other venerable, longstanding entities. See the full list of Disney properties [here](#).

Ms. Lashley will know soon enough if she was selected to be one of only two people chosen for that role every two years, as the process has commenced. "It's very competitive. You go through about four interviews just to get it. The last thing we do is an interview with the president of the company if we make it that far. So for me, one of the main reasons for my participation in the pageant was to get in the mood of looking the part, speaking properly and making sure that I'm prepping myself to become an ambassador. Because for me it's just like being a beauty queen, except I get paid to do it now," she laughed.

"After that, typically people who become ambassadors usually go on to become executives, so we'll see how that goes," she said.

At the end of the day, it's all about following one's passion and dream, Tai said. It's an understanding that has guided her path and led to where she is today, and one she believes will lead her to destiny.

"The best things are borne out of passion. When you find a way to do what you love doing, after a while -- and I'm sure you have your workload -- but if you're happy doing it, then you're going to keep on doing it."



Taiesha Lashley on set during the filming of a

Disney promo video highlighting veterans employed at the company for July 4 celebrations.

Will she ever return home to make a difference, especially since she's already being so effective miles away? It's something Ms. Lashley has thought about. But, "career-wise though, it would be like committing career suicide," she said, adding, "but I definitely keep up with what's going on and I haven't discarded maybe coming home one day and trying to become a senator, or maybe even the commissioner of tourism."

Commissioner of tourism sounds nice and would fit well with Ms. Lashley's line of work. But how about becoming a future governor?

"Maybe... You never know, yes," She laughed.

"I need to finish my masters. And now that I'm thinking of trying to get this ambassador position, I need to think of a backup plan just in case I don't get it for whatever reason. Maybe I'll go back to school and start looking into other things."

Those "other things" could well include a future bid for governor of the United States Virgin Islands.

Lastly, Ms. Lashley, according to this story, is definitely a beautiful heart and driven human being. But what about the things that get on her nerves?

"I hate when people are late; it just drives me insane," she confirmed, laughing hard while doing so.

Correction: July 19, 2016

A previous version of this story incorrectly stated that Ms. Lashley earned \$6 an hour during her intern time at Disney. She actually earned \$8.25 per hour. The story has been updated to reflect the correct information.