

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Marriott Frenchman's Reef Donates \$20,000 To UVI Hospitality Program

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The University of the Virgin Islands' Hospitality and Tourism Management (HTM) program received a \$20,000 donation from the Marriott Frenchman's Reef Resort this fall at the "Growing a Dynamic Hospitality Career: What are the Key Ingredients?" panel discussion, UVI announced today.

Eight Marriott Frenchman's Reef executives from a wide range of departments mentored students at the Administration and Conference Center building on the St. Thomas

Campus. Hospitality and Tourism students and other business majors attended the panel discussion, which was followed by a lively question and answer center with Reef executives. The evening was moderated by UVI faculty member Tamara Lang, director of the HTM program.

“We are proud of this program,” said Dr. Stephen Reames, dean of the School of Business. He thanked the panelists for their strong and continuing support of the program, whose success would not be possible were it not for the support of Marriott Frenchman’s Reef.

Throughout the discussion, panelists shared advice and anecdotes.

“The final pinch of salt before the dish goes out is smiling and saying yes,” said Chef Andrea Conte, director of Food and Beverage. He said that he had learned a lot by moving from a restaurant to a hotel. “It’s totally different,” said Conte. “To succeed in a hotel, you need to get out of the kitchen and see what everybody else is doing. You have to learn about all the areas of the business.”

Aleshia Shorter, director of Finance and Accounting, offered helpful tips for potential job applicants: “When we interview, we want you to give us concrete examples from your personal experience,” said Shorter. “We’re not interested in hypothetical ‘I might do this’ or ‘I would try that.’ You don’t have to be experienced in hospitality; we just want to know that you can transfer the skills you have to any new situation.”

“The first thing we want to see in a candidate is personality,” added Kimberly Farr, director of Human Resources. “You have to want to work at it, and you have to want to learn.”

Bobby Sandhu, director of Rooms Operations, shared a fun personal anecdote that brightened the evening. “I didn’t plan to work in hospitality—I was an economics major,” said Sandhu. “But one day I walked into a hotel in my home town, looked around at the staff, and thought, ‘Why is everybody so happy?’ A manager happened to walk by and asked if he could help me. I said ‘I want to work here’ and was hired on the spot.”

Although the panelists all now work at The Reef, they originally hail from Italy, Ecuador, and several places on the U.S. mainland including California, Detroit and Washington, D.C. Other panelists included Chris Donohue, general manager; Andrea Lightfoot, director of Revenue Management; Catherine Totman, director of Services; and Anthony Armas, director of Sales and Marketing.

Key ingredients for a successful hospitality career that were mentioned repeatedly throughout the evening were an openness and eagerness to learn, determination and focus on long-term goals, building relationships with both co-workers and guests who increasingly seek a personal touch, and a sense of urgency with regard to creating a caring and welcoming experience so customers will want to return again and again.

“Ask yourself,” said Anthony Armas, director of Sales and Marketing, “Would I want me to take care of me?”