

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI Students Lead Effort To Win Home Depot's 'Retool Your School' Grant

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The University of the Virgin Islands is currently in sixth place out of 23 moderately sized Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) that are participating in The Home Depot "Retool Your School" Campus Improvement Grant Program, UVI announced Monday.

Seventy-one schools are participating overall. This program, currently in its eighth year, was developed by Home Depot Store Support Inc. to recognize and encourage innovative projects that enhance the campuses of America's treasured Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

“We are really excited about this student led effort,” said Dr. Camille McKayle, provost and vice president for Academic Affairs. “In addition to having the potential to bring \$50,000 to the University, I believe that the Home Depot Retool Your School Program will also bring Buccaneers, here and past, together to rally around UVI. This should be an exciting race, and I hope that UVI comes out a winner.”

A total of nine first, second and third place grants will be awarded this year – three in each cluster category, based on school’s population – for \$50,000, \$40,000, and \$30,000. All grants will be awarded based on consumer voting and project proposal scores, which are determined by a panel of judges. All government-accredited HBCUs are invited to participate. “I think this is a great opportunity for our school,” said Joash T. Liburd, UVI senior business major with a concentration in finance. Liburd, who is spearheading UVI’s participation in the program, continued, “A lot of UVI students assume we could never win because we’re so small compared to many other HBCUs,” he said. “But this is the second year that we are competing with other schools in our population category so I’m more positive about the outcome.”

Liburd learned about the program when he traveled to Washington D.C. to attend the National HBCU conference in October 2016. There he met representatives from The Home Depot who encouraged him to become an ambassador. Liburd recruited fellow students Che-Raina Warner, Miss UVI/Miss National Black College Alumni Hall of Fame; Aaron Gumbs, a senior Hospitality and Tourism Management Program major; Ish-Shawnn Halbert, a senior biology major; and Kevin Dixon, a graduate student on the Albert A. Sheen Campus and St. Croix Golden Key Chapter president, to help him launch the initiative, which involved qualifying with 100 nominations.

“We are excited to find ourselves in sixth place, but we’d like to close the gap and secure the #1 position in Cluster Two (school population 1,201 – 3,999),” said Liburd. “To do this, we need everyone’s help. Faculty, staff, students and community supporters can all vote, so we’ve been exploring different methods for spreading the word. It’s a big job, but it’ll be worth it if we win.”

Winning first, second or third place prizes involves not only a significant accumulation of votes, but also high scores for proposed projects, which are generated and voted on by students at participating schools. All proposals require the use of materials that can be purchased at Home Depot. Projects should also be visible to the public, and benefit as many students as possible. Ideas that are currently being floated around the UVI campus include a vegetable garden, a greenhouse, and a gazebo.

Online voting began at midnight on Feb. 14, 2017, and will end at 11:59 p.m. on April 16, 2017. During that period, visitors to www.retoolyourschool.com will have a chance to vote for their favorite HBCU once a day. It is also possible to vote on Instagram and Twitter, using the school’s sponsor-provided hashtag, #UVI_RYS17 for an unlimited number of times. Tweets and retweets count as votes, so Liburd and his team advocate Twitter as a powerful platform for accumulating votes. The campus improvement awards will be presented on May 10, 2017.

According to the Retool Your School website, The Home Depot strives to give back to our nation’s HBCUs what they have so generously given to the communities they are a part of: A strong foundation, renewed purpose, and distinctive character. With support from The Home Depot, the program gives schools an opportunity to make upgrades to

their campuses.

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