

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Author And Inspirational Speaker To Keynote UVI Commencement; Renowned Virgin Islanders To Receive Honorary Degrees

Education / **Published On April 18, 2017 06:56 PM /**

Staff **April 18, 2017**



Iyanla Vanzant, prolific and commanding author, soulful priestess, television personality and healer of people, will be the keynote speaker at the University of the Virgin Islands 2017 commencement ceremonies, UVI announced today. These ceremonies will take place on May 11, on the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix; and on May 12, on the St. Thomas Campus. Both ceremonies will begin at 1:30 p.m.

"Commencement is the most special part of our academic year," said UVI President David Hall. "It is the time we celebrate the enormous work of our students, faculty and

staff. It is the culmination of a life changing journey, especially for our students.” Hall continued, “I am especially proud that our Commencement Speaker is world renown author, inspirational speaker, and television personality, Iyanla Vanzant. She is the anchor program of the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN), and has helped to heal and inspire so many individuals and families.”

From Brooklyn welfare mom to New York Times best-selling author and NAACP Image Award winner, Iyanla Vanzant is one of America’s most influential writers and speakers on topics such as social engagement and spiritual development. Her breakout hit, “Iyanla: Fix My Life” on OWN, now in its fifth season, has received critical acclaim including from Winfrey herself who said that Iyanla’s program “puts the real in reality.”

Vanzant is also a frequent co-host on “Oprah’s LifeClass” – the revolutionary self-help program that showcases lessons, revelations and a-ha moments through which people strive to make their lives happier and more fulfilling. Each episode features guests from around the world who connect through Skype, Facebook and Twitter.

As an author, Vanzant has penned 19 books, an amazing six of which have landed on the New York Times Best-Seller List. Her work has been translated into 23 languages and has sold more than 10 million copies. With her no-nonsense approach to self-discovery and her underlying message of “live better by loving yourself,” Vanzant has focused on faith, empowerment and loving relationships to inspire millions of people around the world.

A woman of passion, vision and purpose, Vanzant is also a highly sought after public speaker and spiritual guide who founded the Inner Visions Institute for Spiritual Development. With classes and workshops conducted throughout the United States, this multicultural global network seeks to facilitate healing, growth and spiritual development.

Honorary Degrees

“This commencement ceremony is particularly special because it is occurring during the Centennial year of the Virgin Islands’ transfer to the United States, and during the 55th Anniversary of the University,” said President Hall. “These dual landmarks create a profound moment for the institution and its graduates. We are also honored to again recognize two outstanding Virgin Islanders at the commencement ceremony by awarding honorary degrees to Ms. Ruth E. Thomas, an outstanding educator, and Mr. Stanley Jacobs, a musical genius.”

Ruth E. Thomas

Ruth Elma Thomas is a widely respected linguist, community activist and educator who has received numerous honors and awards for her outstanding achievements in education, government and community service. Her determination to elevate standards of public education in the Virgin Islands are well-known throughout the community, and have left an indelible mark on the territory.

In recognition of her service to her community, Thomas’ work and qualities have been recognized by many groups such as Charlotte Amalie High School (CAHS) reunion classes, the Business and Professional Women’s Club, the Nevis Benevolent Society and the St. Thomas-St. John Chamber of Commerce. Most notably, in 1998, legislation

designated that the auditorium at CAHS be named the Ruth E. Thomas Auditorium. In recent years, Thomas has served as a regular Monday morning commentator on Radio Station WSTA's "Sound Off," which has developed a large fan base, and has published anthologies of her commentaries and poetry.

Thomas started her higher education at the City College of New York before transferring to Fisk University in Nashville, Tenn. where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English in 1949. Two study leaves earned her a Master's of Science in linguistics in 1957 and an Education Specialist degree in secondary school administration in 1970, both from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

She returned to St. Thomas and began teaching at her alma mater, Charlotte Amalie High School (CAHS), where she served for 33 years until she retired from her post as principal in 1982.

Formal retirement did not curtail Thomas' involvement with education or service to the community. A partial list of her post-retirement activities includes part-time teaching at the University of the Virgin Islands; consulting and administrative work for the V.I. Community Action Agency; memberships with the League of Women Voters and the V.I. Partners for Health; board memberships at the University of the Virgin Islands, Foundation for the Reichhold Center for the Arts, the Girl Scouts, and the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands. In recognition of her exemplary service to UVI, Thomas was named Trustee Emeritus of the UVI Board of Trustees and an Emeritus member of the Foundation for the Reichhold Center.

Stanley Jacobs

Stanley Jacobs, known affectionately as "Stanley" to thousands of Virgin Islanders, has also made enormous contributions to the territory, most notably with his merry band of "Sleepless Knights". Born on the island of Vieques, he migrated to St. Croix at an early age where he eventually became a master musician, maestro, historian and cultural preservationist with a special passion for promoting the territory's indigenous music, Quelbe, not just locally but globally as well.

Jacobs spent his formative years in Gallows Bay where he attended Christiansted High School, then went on to graduate from Lincoln University with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology in 1963. After serving in the U.S. Army as a medic and becoming a social worker at the Herbert Grigg Home for the Aged, he returned home to his beloved St. Croix. Although he had started playing instruments at a young age, it wasn't until he worked at Herbert Grigg Home that he received the education of a lifetime from residents who taught him about Quadrille and Quelbe music, many of whom were musical icons of their times.

In the late 1960's, Jacobs formed a band with his childhood friends, which eventually assumed the moniker, "Stanley and the Ten Sleepless Knights." The group, which has been performing locally and abroad for the last 45 years, is often referred to as the "Kings of Quelbe" and a "Virgin Islands Treasure." They award scholarships to Virgin Islands students who are pursuing degrees in music, which is compatible with their mission to preserve Virgin Islands indigenous music and teach its historical and cultural significance.

Jacobs' has received numerous awards and recognitions for his outstanding public service and impactful contributions to folkloric local music and culture. Because of his passion and leadership, in 2003, the 25th Legislature of the Virgin Islands passed Bill No. 25-0056, which designates Quelbe as the official music of the Virgin Islands, requiring that it be taught in the public schools. Jacobs is a true Virgin Islands music ambassador and icon who continues to offer his time, energy and musical talent for the enjoyment and benefit of the people of the Virgin Islands.

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