

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## 'Be Not Content With Littleness': More Than 100 Graduate From UVI On St. Croix

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ST. CROIX -- There was something unique about UVI's 2017 Commencement on St. Croix, held in the St. Croix Educational Complex auditorium after an abundance of rain [impacted the original location](#) -- the grounds of the Albert A. Sheen Campus. Late Thursday morning, it became clear that the event would have to be moved, a monumental task for those responsible for the graduation, but one that was done nonetheless.

Seemingly in no time, UVI moved its graduation ceremony to the high school; Governor Kenneth Mapp, during his talk, expressed confidence that the disruption would move local leaders to build the [promised complex](#) that would house not only graduations, but

other major events.

Entering the auditorium, one would easily believe -- if they were not privy to what had occurred -- that it was the original location. Decorations were in place, the stage looked well organized as it hosted dignitaries, the university's band and its choir. The graduating class sat at the front in the center row of the auditorium, while faculty sat at the front on the left side. In essence, UVI had risen above the circumstances placed before it, seamlessly transitioning from a potential disaster to a commencement event that lifted the spirits of graduates -- already overjoyed that their day had finally arrived after years of hard work and sleepless nights -- and friends and family alike, as Dr. David Hall, UVI's president, spoke highly of this year's graduating class, and Iyanla Vanzant, who UVI described as a prolific and commanding author, inspirational speaker, television personality and healer of people, gave an inspirational talk aimed at moving graduates to think big and do big.

"I charge you that no matter what you face, no matter what comes your way, keep rising, keep overcoming challenges that you might face," Dr. Hall said, as if thinking of the hurdle that UVI overcame moments earlier. "I charge you to make this community, this nation and this world a better place because of the gifts and skills, and insights that you have. I charge you to always love yourself. but I charge to you to make sure you love and



Charles "Pollo" Goodings receives degree

from UVI President Dr. David Hall. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

Ms. Vanzant encouraged graduates to move beyond small thinking and expand their horizon. "I want to bring you this address today not as a New York Times bestseller and author of books," she began, deeming her accomplishments irrelevant from the perspective through which she wanted to convey her message. "I want to bring you this message not as someone that's different from you, but someone who has stood where you stood, sat where you sat, been where you've been and hopefully will call you forward." The message, she said, would be conveyed through her years as a pregnant teenager in Brooklyn, or from the lens of someone who fell in love with the wrong person on multiple occasions, "and had to get over that heartbreak and get focused on who I was and what I was doing and what I was about," she said.

She spoke of her grandmother who scrubbed floors and toilets to provide for her and her siblings. Ms. Vanzant also included the perspective of her African ancestors being brought to the U.S. and the Caribbean on boats. "And I want to share with you what I learned in those places, those difficult, dark places. Those places that nobody celebrated for me or within me or as me. I want to speak to you -- the one thing that I've learned in

those places that has been the tool that I used to rise, the ladder that I climbed up on, and that is this: be not content with littleness," she said.

This year's class dubbed themselves Undefeated, Valiant and Industrious. The graduates studied in a variety of fields, receiving degrees in bachelors of arts, accounting, business administration, elementary education, secondary education, communications, criminal justice, psychology and social sciences, science, applied mathematics, biology, chemistry, computer science, marine biology, mathematics and nursing. Some also graduated with their master's degree in business administration, hospitality and tourism management, information systems and technology.

Class speaker, Carlotta Walcott, spoke of the difficulty students faced during the years of study, and how they cultivated inventiveness to succeed. "To survive we learned very quickly [that] like any true champion, we needed a good strategy," she said. "We needed to have both offensive and defensive techniques. We took some big jabs and powerful crosses. Sometimes we felt those one-two combinations were going to knock us out -- but we rallied. There were some hooks and uppercuts that almost took our breaths away. But we are here, we survived the rounds, we are undefeated."

Mr. Mapp and Senate President Myron Jackson congratulated the graduates. "We are proud of you," the governor said, making mention later in his talk of job opportunities that he said are available. Mr. Jackson spoke of the importance of using one's gift as a path to success. "That gift opens up and provides the source. If you don't use it, it's not going to work," he said.

Graduates were elated throughout the ceremony, keeping the room lively with screams and horns as they were called up to receive their degrees. Some pointed to the sky in apparent gratitude to God; others jumped, screamed and smiled as they walked the stage and were congratulated by dignitaries. One of the most expressive students was Charles "Pollo" Goodings, who spoke to The Consortium following the ceremony. Mr. Goodings is a member of one of the most popular bands in the Virgin Islands, the Stylee Band -- which has a busy schedule of performances outside the territory.

"I feel great, I feel honored. Just grateful to be alive. Thankful for all these blessings" Mr. Goodings began. "I really worked hard for it. I am grateful for God giving me the opportunity; I did all that was asked and more, so I'm really glad for this opportunity."

His story -- like UVI's determination to quickly find and dress up a new location for its graduation when the challenging circumstance arose -- speaks directly to the message relayed by Dr. Hall and Ms. Vanzant of rising above the challenge and not being content with littleness.

"A lot of sleepless nights and determination," Mr. Goodings said led to his moment on Thursday. "Honestly, it was straight from a plane ride, a boat ride, then straight to class. Emailing professors asking for early time. Sometimes I would do the work in advance so I could be here today. A lot of sacrifices led to be being here today," he said.

UVI's St. Thomas commencement ceremony takes place today.

*Feature Image: Graduate Shedi Rogers with degree raised during Thursday's graduation ceremony. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)*

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