

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Croix UVI Class Of 2018 Graduates With Exceptional Record, Boasting Multiple 'Firsts'

Education / **Published On May 19, 2018 10:36 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **May 19, 2018**



ST. CROIX -- The atmosphere was pregnant with euphoria that was tickled every time a speaker said something even with the slightest of optimism. Gathered in a tent on the Albert A. Sheen Campus here on Friday afternoon, the over 100 students who made up the St. Croix graduating class this year, dubbed themselves the "Enriched, Elite and Educated Class of 2018", and boldly acted like it -- from Reba K. Dickson, who gave the invocation and asked God to impress upon the hearts of local leaders to continue financially supporting the institution from which she graduated, to Jaecena C. Howell, who delivered an impassioned class address that was capped with a scholarship donation to UVI to be given to a first-generation UVI student.

Indeed, this year's class, as boasted by Ms. Howell, was one of firsts: The first graduating class to donate a scholarship of which 85 percent of the class was a party to; the first class to see five cadets being commissioned; the first class with three [13D](#) winners, and the first class with bachelors of science in nursing graduates.

The class, charged and ready to scream, let out a loud cheer after being reminded of their uniqueness by their confident class speaker.

And so it was, then, for the remainder of the commencement ceremony on St. Croix, as speaker after speaker aroused an excitement that was already inside those graduating. One need not wonder where such joy came from; simply graduating college, which could be a battering experience, is enough cause to jump and skip with elation.



UVI's 2018 Graduating Class on the Albert A. Sheen Campus (Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

But the class of 2018 had endured much more. They had survived, both literally and figuratively, Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the 2017 storms that wrecked the entire U.S. Virgin Islands while leaving many in the territory in the dark for months, and disrupting the routine flow of regular life. This was best encapsulated in words by UVI President David Hall and Ms. Howell.

"We do not know all of the individual challenges that you may have faced, for this is your personal journey," Mr. Hall said. "For the class of 2018 though, we may not know all of the individual hurdles you had to overcome to be sitting here today, yet we do know you confronted and overcame two Category 5 hurricanes that tried to keep you from sitting here today."

"All those nights doing homework in the dark with only a flashlight or candle for light. All those nights of staying at UVI for ridiculous hours because we had no internet at home to complete assignments. All those days we came to class untidy because we had no running water, no iron, no electricity -- yet we were still volunteering to help other communities, other islands and our own community," Ms. Howell said, adding, "Many of us did this even while working or taking care of children." At each pause, the graduating class gave fuel to Ms. Howell with resounding applause and cheers.

The keynote address, delivered by acclaimed actor and film maker Danny Glover, was no less buoyant. He lauded the class for having lived through the devastating storms, but also pivoted to speak on the great responsibility that lies before this generation. The future is yours, he emphasized, speaking to the graduating class, charging them to grab hold of the present to help make the next level of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream a reality -- even while remembering the leaders of the past who paved the way.

"If we stand tall, we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us," Mr. Glover said. "And certainly you stand tall as graduates of the University of the Virgin Islands, because you stand on the shoulders of those who came before you."

Governor Kenneth Mapp congratulated the class and, as was the case last year, told them that job opportunities awaited in the local government -- this time carrying more weight, he said, because of the abundance of federal dollars that have been made available to the territory following the 2018 storms.

Other speakers -- all giving congratulatory remarks -- included Senate President Myron Jackson and Richard Motta, who represented Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett.

When the students finally got to receive their diplomas that they had worked long years for, the euphoria that had bubbled all during the ceremony, overflowed. Some were overwhelmed with tears, others screamed -- all felt accomplished -- as they walked passed the finish line of one journey to face another.