

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI St. Croix Graduates Largest Nursing Class To Date

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ST. CROIX -- The University of the Virgin Islands' School of Nursing held its pinning ceremony on St. Croix at the U.V.I. Great Hall Tuesday. The pinning ceremony marks the moment when students become nursing professionals. A selfsame event was held on the St. Thomas UVI campus last week, where 6 graduated.

The 2019 graduating class of St. Croix, however, is the School of Nursing's largest to date boasting fifteen students. The class was dubbed "The Hurricane Class" because they have had to overcome so many obstacles including family separation and other family losses.

“At one time, after acquiring their associate in nursing, St. Croix students would have to travel to St. Thomas in order to complete their bachelor of science in nursing (B.S.N.). Now, St. Croix nursing students have the same opportunity as their St. Thomas counterparts,” said special guest Ann Doute, the chair for the Virgin Islands Board of Nurse Licensure. The B.S.N. program was implemented in St. Croix just two years ago [through a bill sponsored by Senator Kurt Vialet](#).

Keynote speaker Valerie Lee, who was selected by the graduating class, offered a wealth of advice to the students. “Set a date for the nursing boards now, do not be afraid to ask questions, take the time to get to know your patients, trust your gut if you feel something is wrong, do not take it too personal when the conditions are not the best, do the right thing the first time, never use 'busy' as an excuse, be a leader not a follower, and never stop learning,” she stressed. She also encouraged them to “go for their masters.”



Manal Asad and family

Ms. Lee has 38 years of nursing experience, 33 of which were in a leadership capacity. She is a native Virgin Islander who says she is honored to come home and share her garnered knowledge and experience. She is the nursing manager at Governor Juan F. Luis (J.F.L.) hospital and wasted no time telling graduates to consider the hospital as they advance to the next step in their professional journey.

Three graduates from U.V.I.'s School of Nursing class of 1969 were invited to attend: Magda Finch, Janise Bolling-James, and Joycelyn Nicholas-Foster. This year is their 50-year anniversary. Ms. Finch told the students to go forth and take good care of patients and make U.V.I. proud of the products they have produced.



Dr. Desiree Bertrand, assistant professor at U.V.I., listed several reasons for pursuing a B.S.N. She said there was a shift to primary and preventative care with less focus on inpatient and setting; the propensity for an increase in lifetime earnings is great; there is an associated higher chance of becoming a registered nurse; and there is a likelihood of securing a management title.

Emotions ran high and tears flowed as some students shared how, despite adversity, they persevered and pressed their way through. The family support they received was instrumental in assuring their final push to the finish line. This accomplishment was twice as sweet for the Henry family as two sisters, Natasha and Vernonsa Henry, stood proudly while their parents and other family members proudly pinned them.

The Suarez family beamed with pride as their daughter, Denicia Suarez, belted a rendition of Whitney Houston's "I Didn't Know My Own Strength" that she dedicated to her fellow graduates. Denicia said, "Working full-time at J.F.L. was challenging while being in the program. However, my Labor and Delivery team always supported me and assured me that I could and would accomplish my goal of attaining my bachelors, and I did." Denicia intends to eventually realize her doctor of nursing practice (D.N.P.) with a concentration in neonatology.



Class of 1969

Now that graduation and the pinning ceremony is behind them, the next step is taking the nursing exam to become registered nurses. Dr. Beverly Lansiquot, dean at UVI's School of Nursing, shared that the students, "demonstrate knowledge, skills, and attitude to be presented to the V.I. Board as candidates worthy of taking the licensure exam." She encouraged them to "be inspired to further your education and experience new opportunities to expand their personal and professional goals."

Feature Image: Delisha Stoute (Shenneth Canegata, VIC)

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