

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI Graduates Close To 100 On St. Croix; Limetree Bay Hires Young Men Ahead Of Conferment

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ST. CROIX -- The University of the Virgin Islands' (UVI) first of two commencement ceremonies took place Thursday on the conference grounds at the Albert A. Sheen campus. Nearly 100 hundred degrees were conferred here, with many students earning multiple degrees.

Dr. David Hall, UVI president, said the class of 2019 is special because it is the first class that offered a doctorate degree in creative leadership for innovation and change. He also noted that the class was the first with an alumni who graduated 30 years ago and is now seated on the stage as governor of the Virgin Islands. Mr. Hall said that the only thing wrong with the 2019 class is that they were graduating too early because they are the

last class that would not benefit from the free tuition program, a bill former governor Kenneth Mapp signed into law. The UVI president also noted that the B.S.N. program boasted 15 graduates, the largest nursing class to graduate to date, deeming it a testament that “If you build it, they will come.”

Mr. Hall then introduced the keynote speaker, Bakari Sellers, CNN political analyst, former state legislature and lawyer from South Carolina, who he also labeled “a progressive voice for change” and “the voice crying out in the political wilderness of America.”

Mr. Sellers told the graduates, “Great things come from modest beginnings.” He encouraged them not to take advice from people who tell them what to do with their lives because they have an educated mind. “You are resilient, determined, and unshakeable,” he said, quoting the class of 2019’s theme. “Do not be afraid to be the miracles you already are. Imagine what is possible,” he continued. “And do not forget to call your mother,” he said with a smile.



(Left to right) Deshaun Garvey, Victoria Henry (Program Director of Process Technology), Khari Hopkins, Bryan Petersen, Meredith Prince (Professor, Process Technology) & Regina Evans (Picture Credit: Shenneth Canegata)

Honorary degrees were given to Dr. Simon Jones-Hendrikson, who has worked at UVI for 38 years, and Mr. Sellers, who was Time Magazine's "40 under 40" honoree.

Limetree Bay employed three young graduates as process operators well in advance of their graduation commencement date. Khari Hopkins and Deshaun Garvey both earned an associate degree in applied sciences, process technology and Bryan Petersen earned a degree in chemistry and proudly stated that he would soon have a degree in process technology by the end of the summer. They each completed a 6-week internship with Limetree Bay and are already employed in their field of study. Mr. Garvey explained that he and Mr. Hopkins had to take time off from work to attend their graduation. When he was asked what the next step was, he said with a big smile, "The plant on the highway. I am going to own that." He continued, "This is just the beginning. We [he and Mr. Hopkins] are coming back to UVI to get our process engineering degrees, most likely in the Spring. We want to take things up another notch and instead of just working on the units, we will be facilitating designs and plans for how to make them run more efficiently."

Victoria Henry, program director of process technology at UVI, is very proud of Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Garvey's accomplishments. She has been at UVI for two years, and they are her first graduates to complete the program. Mr. Hopkins started the program fall 2017 and Mr. Garvey started spring 2018. Ms. Henry began with a degree in process technology as well, then furthered her education in the field of chemistry, and eventually chemical engineering. Meredith Prince, professor in process technology, teaches the electrical component of the course. He introduced two other upcoming Spring semester graduates, Bryan Petersen and Regina Evans. Ms. Evans has a degree in biology and is now enrolled in the applied sciences in process technology course.



Graduating Class of 2019

The Henry sisters, Vernonsha and Natasha, who both just earned their BSN, shared their inspiration for entering the medical field. Natasha said that when she was a young girl her brother was hit by a car right in front of her and she did not know what to do; she felt useless just standing there. Also, one of her younger sisters was found unresponsive and, again, she felt helpless. She explained that she did not like that inability to react and save a life, so it inspired her to become a nurse. She intends to get her master's degree and become a nurse practitioner. She is also determined to eventually start a nonprofit organization that focuses on meeting the needs of the homeless on the island.

Vernonsha's interest in the health field began when she was just a young girl. She has always been inspired by the desire to serve in the medical field and care for others. She watched every show that encompassed what she aspired to become, anything that depicted the field of medicine. Not only does she want to help others get well, she loves to interact with people and bring them joy. Her goal is to become certified in neonatology.



The class of 1969 was present to celebrate their 50th year as UVI Alumni. They have been participating in all of the pre-commencement and commencement activities.

Governor Albert Bryan, who graduated from UVI exactly 30 years ago to the day, told the graduates that he wanted to tell them something he had not shared before. He said, "I did not graduate magna cum laude or summa cum laude, I graduated "Thank you lord-e." The message was if you did not do your best, do not give up. Get up and try again. He may have graduated "Thank you lord-e" 30 years ago, but he is the governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands today. Other speakers included Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, and Novelle Francis, Senate president.

The territory's Generation Z and Millennials are arming themselves for success. Many of them earned multiple degrees and desire to be game changers, pioneers leading the charge. They appeared unafraid to navigate uncharted territory, and their focus -- gathered from the commencement -- was not just on the 'here and now,' but pointedly towards the future -- determined to prepare themselves to build a better tomorrow. They also shared their desire to make an impact on a grander scale; to make their mark in this world, undaunted by the notion of obstacles.