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UVI Receives Bennie and Martha Benjamin Foundation Gift to Support School of Nursing and COVID-19 Response

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The University of the Virgin Islands on Tuesday announced that it accepted four new gifts from the Bennie & Martha Benjamin Foundation (Benjamin Foundation) that will bolster the university's School of Nursing program and improve delivery of health services to students, faculty and staff in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

According to UVI, the gifts include two birthing simulators and mannequins (one for each campus), telehealth software licenses for the campuses' clinicians and funds to purchase necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) for the Student Health Centers on both campuses.

“The Bennie & Martha Benjamin Foundation has been a dedicated partner of UVI every year since 1992,” stated Mitchell Neaves, vice president for Institutional Advancement at UVI. “As always, and especially in times of need, the Benjamin Foundation has been very proactive in investing in the university. These new gifts from the Bennie & Martha Benjamin Foundation come at an opportune time as we continue to respond to Coronavirus cases across the Territory and train the next class of nursing students to enter the healthcare field,” said Neaves. “We could not be more grateful for their continued partnership and generosity.”

Dr. Maritza DeCosta, director of Health Services at UVI, called the gift “a blessing.” Since March, campus clinicians have had to provide telehealth services to mitigate the risk of spreading Coronavirus in the community. With the software licenses purchased by the Benjamin Foundation, clinicians on both campuses can use the full capabilities of the Doxy.me software to operate a comprehensive virtual clinic. “Students rely on us for their health needs and have grown comfortable using the campus clinics. The gift makes it possible for us to still maintain contact with students if they’re not feeling well and provide personalized care in a virtual setting,” said Dr. DeCosta. Additionally, when in-person care is essential, nurses must gear up in full PPE. “The cost of the PPE is one we didn’t anticipate before the pandemic,” said Dr. DeCosta. “Add that to the challenge of getting supplies in the Virgin Islands – the funding will certainly help us.”

The School of Nursing (SON) has long been a recipient of gifts from the Benjamin Foundation. Ten years ago, the Foundation donated two birth simulators designed to provide a complete childbirth simulation experience before, during and after delivery. The new simulators will allow the SON to upgrade the technology used to provide a comprehensive teaching system and equitable experiences for all students on both campuses. “These are invaluable resources for our faculty and students,” said Dr. Beverley Lansiquot, dean of the School of Nursing. “This donation directly impacts all students enrolled in the program who might otherwise miss the opportunity to observe and learn the nursing principles and practice during labor and delivery. The School of Nursing is exceedingly grateful to the Martha & Bennie Benjamin Foundation for their continued support,” said Dr. Lansiquot.

The Bennie and Martha Benjamin Foundation was created in 1991 in honor of Claude “Bennie” Benjamin, a Crucian songwriter who rose to fame in New York during the 1940s and 1950s. “He never forgot where he came from,” said David Beale, president and executive director of the Benjamin Foundation entrusted with carrying out Benjamin’s wishes following his death in 1989. “He believed his success was owed to many people which is why he desired to give back to his community,” said Beale. The Benjamin Foundation’s mandate includes providing medical and allied health scholarships to Virgin Islands residents who commit to practicing in the Virgin Islands, and to promoting health care in the Territory by providing grants for equipment, programs and educational services.

According to the release, through the longstanding partnership with UVI, the foundation has awarded scholarships and grants totaling \$973,376.96 including scholarships for students and nursing school faculty seeking higher education degrees in health care; training equipment including simulators, hospital beds, nursing tools, educational media and computers; improving and equipping facilities including the student health centers on the St. Thomas and Albert A. Sheen Campuses, nursing and science books for the library on St. Croix; a library Handicap Table, educational programing including a nursing lecture series; and grants for UVI CELL to offer training programs. In addition, for many years the Benjamin Foundation sponsored the Benjamin Student Nurse Extern Program, a collaboration between UVI and Schneider Regional Medical Center which provided salaries for UVI nursing students to gain experience working at the hospital during the summer.

“It gives us a lot of satisfaction to observe the benefits of the various donations and to be able to talk to the nursing students about their experiences,” said Beale, who visits the university each year from Florida where the Benjamin Foundation is based. “We value the relationships we have had with the wonderful people of the Virgin Islands and especially with UVI.”

For more information on ways to support UVI and its students, contact pr@uvi.edu and visit www.uvi.edu.

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