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Microsoft and UVI Establish Relationship With Big Plans in Mind

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A partnership between the University of the Virgin Islands and Microsoft, which includes an ongoing five-day tech summit with the V.I. government focused on how the USVI can use technology to address some of its problems was announced Monday during the Gov't House weekly press briefing.

The summit is meant to "shape the future of technology across the territory and access to technology right here in our U.S. Virgin Islands," said Richard Motta, Gov't House communications director.

UVI President Dr. David Hall said the focus of the summit "is to benefit from the insights, power and years of experience of the leading technology company in the nation, Microsoft, and to use

that resource as a way to improve governmental processes." The UVI president spoke of agriculture production and energy challenges as some of the areas he'd like to see improvements as part of the partnership.

"Every major issue that the territory faces will be addressed through this summit," he said. "We are not pretending to come up with final answers in just one week, but we do believe developing a blueprint on how we can use technology to improve the quality of our lives is something that is so important."

Microsoft representative at the event, William Adams, stated, "On my employee badge it says empower every person on the planet to achieve more, and in order to do that you really need to be engaged with all sorts of people around the planet. So the Virgin Islands represents to me and Microsoft an opportunity to engage with a new set of people."

Mr. Adams emphasized that Microsoft wouldn't "come in with heavy feet, throwing our weight around, just saying, you're going to do this, you're going to do that now pay me all this money. That's not our approach at all. We come in with all humility. I come in and say I want to be a part of this community, I want to listen, I want to learn what is needed here."



He said the company's approach to the tech summit is to first listen — to the people and its government — and then share solutions. "Technology doesn't solve all problems but there are some challenges that technology is the right solution, so we bring those solutions and work together and figure out what Microsoft can do."

Mr. Adams also stressed that the company wasn't seeking handouts. "The other part of it is for us, we are not coming in asking for something. I don't need a special tax credit before I will activate. We have been working with the university for the last couple of months simply because it's the right thing to do. It's mutually beneficial for both of us." Mr. Williams said Microsoft does not have the intention of seeking Economic Development Authority benefits if it were to take on projects that include economic development.

Dr. Hall said the partnership with Microsoft won't just end after the summit; he said the firm will be involved in designing and equipping an innovation center that will launch later this year. He said the innovation center was "in the process of development" on St. Thomas, and it will be at the location of [the failed West Bay Supermarket](#). A location at the St. Croix campus will also be sought.

Dr. Hall also seeks to partner with Microsoft on medical school-related projects.

Mr. Adams said he'd like to see the partnership with Microsoft at the UVI medical school innovate, not "just chasing the tail lights of other schools around but they are leapfrogging and getting to a place where other islands say, 'I want to go there because they have the most advanced learning curriculum and learning tools available compared to anyone.'"

On Microsoft's vision for the territory, Mr. Adams said, "We're looking at creating engineering offices similar to the way we looked at Kenya and Nigeria. That starts with doing a pilot of sorts. You don't just start day one and say we are going to open an office with 500 people. You have to come in and decide what are we likely to develop here, which groups are likely to want to come here and all that. We are on the first step of that journey."

Mr. Adams added, "The primary methodology is to develop and use talent here, not necessarily to show up, recruit a bunch of people and take them away, that's a critical piece. We intend to do work here and over time, over the next few months, next year [decide] what exactly is the best kind of work to be doing here."