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UVI Names Administrative Building in Honor of President Emerita Dr. LaVerne Ragster

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UVI Administrators and Legislators witness the unveiling of the LaVerne E. Ragster Administrative and Conference Center's new sign. By. THE UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS.

The Administration and Conference Center Building at the University of the Virgin Islands' Orville E. Kean Campus on St. Thomas has been named in honor of President Emerita Dr. LaVerne E. Ragster, the University's fourth president, UVI announced Wednesday.

According to the release, in addition to authorizing the naming of the campus' administrative hub in Dr. Ragster's honor, Bill No. 34-0148 of the 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands recognizes her contributions to UVI and the territory in research and science as well as her contributions to

the children of the Virgin Islands.

The 31,000-square-foot building, which features state-of-the-art energy and cooling systems, is the “nerve-center” for University operations, serving students, faculty, and the community in an integrated manner. It is now designated the LaVerne E. Ragster Administration and Conference Center and continues to meet various administrative needs, UVI said.

“Naming this building in honor of Dr. LaVerne Ragster is an incredibly fitting tribute to a colleague who has dedicated so much of her life’s work to strengthening and growing UVI’s profile both at home and abroad. Her contributions to the academic and administrative life of this University have had an impact that goes far beyond these walls. Dr. Ragster’s presidential legacy continues to inspire me, and it gives me immense pleasure to participate in this moment,” said UVI President Dr. David Hall.

“I am humbled and feel honored for what I see as recognition for my understanding of how important the University of the Virgin Islands is to the future of this territory, and for making the effort to make it stronger and more valuable to the people of the Virgin Islands,” said Dr. Ragster. “I thank the 34th Legislature and our governor for bestowing this honor upon me. It has been my pleasure to serve the students, faculty, and staff of this fine University.”

UVI said that as part of the recovery effort from earlier hurricanes and to make the university more competitive and more valuable to the Virgin Islands community, Dr. Ragster and her executive team obtained bond funds to support many repairs and renovations, including the renovation of the former Harvey building 21 to its new incarnation, the Administration and Conference Center. Under her leadership, UVI attained investment-grade rating (BBB) by Standard and Poor’s and the sale of \$21 million in bonds to support capital improvements on UVI’s campuses in 2004.

Dr. Ragster, who was the first woman to lead the University, served as UVI’s president from 2002 to 2009. During her tenure, the University focused significant efforts on the evolution of internal systems that supported service to students, faculty, and the community; stronger linkages to higher education and governments in the rest of Eastern Caribbean; and increased accountability to faculty, students, and the community, focused by the vision and goals of the strategic plan (VISION 2012).

Also, new facilities on both campuses, a revised governance system, significant planning and hardware, software and training needed to upgrade campus technologies, and more reporting and greater transparency in communications between administration and university community were important parts of the changes implemented during Dr. Ragster’s leadership, according to the release. She provided leadership and support to a participative process leading to reaffirmation of accreditation of UVI for 10 years by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in 2007.

While serving as president of UVI, Dr. Ragster achieved the development and initiation of a shared governance framework in support of effective governance at the University from 2007 to 2009, the creation of an in-house mediation program to reduce conflict and improve employee relations at UVI in 2009, and the development of the \$1.3 million Leapfrog project to increase and strengthen the technological and human resources capacity needed to implement VISION 2012 from 2007 to 2009.

Her teaching and research included positions at the College of the Virgin Islands (now UVI) and the Caribbean Research Institute (now the Eastern Caribbean Center). After helping to build academic programs for a decade, she began to focus her efforts on the development and evolution

of UVI as an administrator and manager, eventually holding numerous administrative positions, including Chair of the Division of Science and Mathematics, faculty trustee to the UVI Board of Trustees, acting Vice President for Research and Land Grant Affairs, Vice President for Research and Public Service, Senior Vice President, and Provost.

She also helped to link the University to other higher education institutions in the region when she served as Sub-Secretary General for the Association of Caribbean Universities and Research Institutes and as the Coordinator of the Consortium of Caribbean Universities for Natural Resource Management, according to the release.

Dr. Ragster has worked with non-governmental and regional organizations, including the Caribbean Studies Association (past president), Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (board member, past chair of the board), Caribbean Conservation Association (past vice president), Island Resources Foundation (board member), The Nature Conservancy (board member) and the Caribbean Council for Science and Technology (USVI representative). She has published papers on the role of natural resources in resource management and development, produced programs for the training of faculty and resource managers, and developed curriculum materials to teach natural resource management at the university level in the Caribbean. She has been recognized and honored by Virgin Islands organizations, national organizations, higher education institutions, and the President of the United States for her teaching, work in conservation, leadership, and community service.

Born and raised in St. Thomas, Dr. Ragster earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology and Chemistry from the University of Miami, a Master of Science in Biology (algal physiology) from San Diego State University, and a Ph.D. in Biology (plant physiology) from the University of California, San Diego.