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'Unstoppable' UVI Graduates on St. Thomas Celebrate 'End Zone' Accomplishment, Ready to Shape Future

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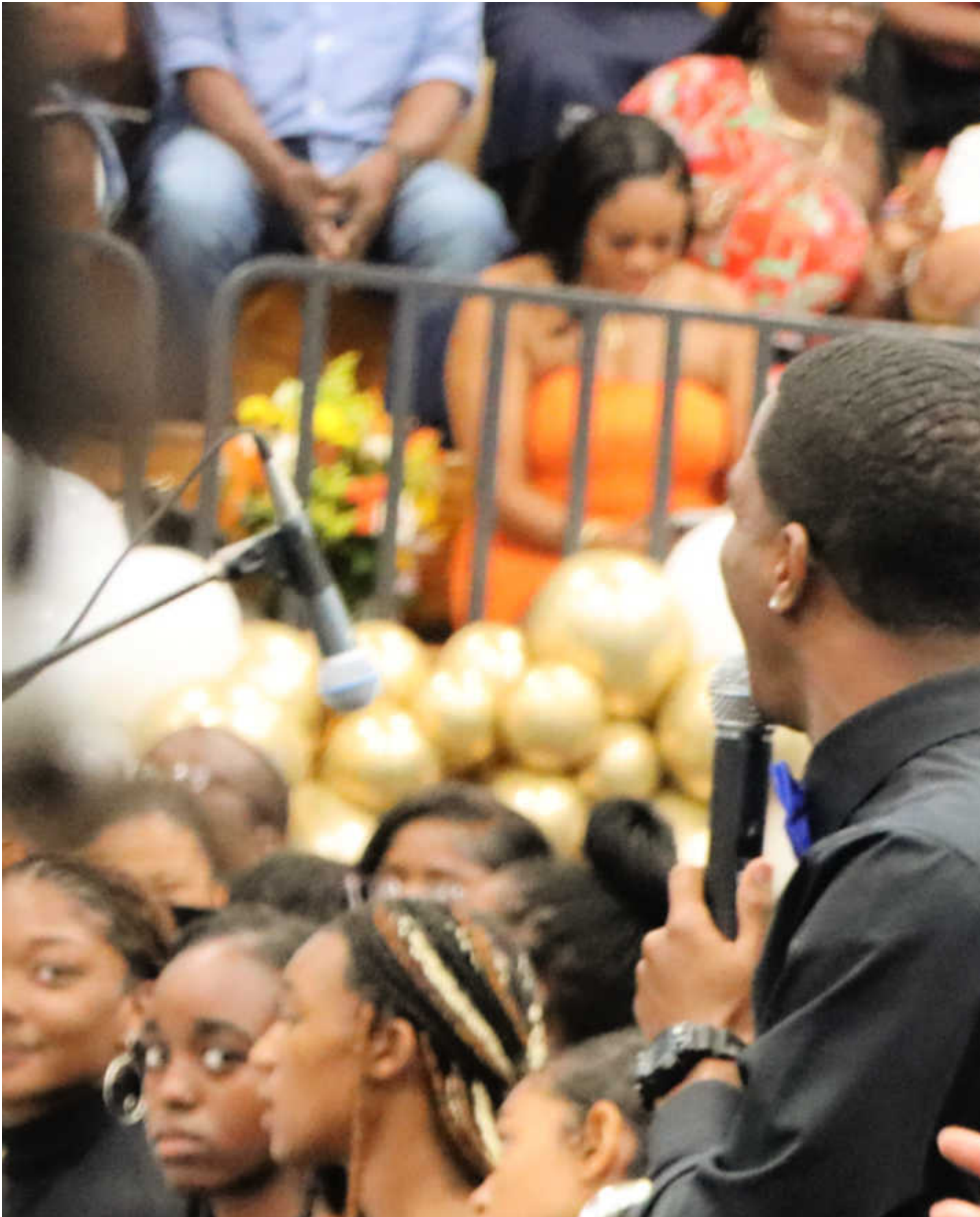
UVI's 59th Commencement Ceremony at the Orville E. Kean Campus on St. Thomas. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

The University of the Virgin Islands concluded its 59th commencement with the second of two graduation ceremonies hosted at its Orville E. Kean Campus on St. Thomas.

UVI President David Hall beamed with pride as he addressed the class, declaring to the 191 graduates, "We did drop the ball at times but you picked it up and scored. And now is your moment to dance in the end zone." As he did at Wednesday's commencement ceremony on St. Croix, Hall applauded the determination and perseverance of the graduating class, acknowledging that many faced challenges such as scarce finances, which they were able to overcome through

actions including diligently pursuing scholarships and other forms of financial aid.

“Your individual and collective story is what inspires us to do this work. And if we knew all the forces that stood in your way we would truly be amazed,” Hall told the graduating class, which called themselves the Ambitious, Resilient Unstoppable class of 2023. “Your story, like you, is real, compelling and will always be a part of the UVI story. Continue to write your story, wherever you go, through your living, and through the commitment and sacrifices that you make to change the world.”



The class of 2023 also received words of wisdom and encouragement from keynote speaker Dr. Michael E. Dyson, an acclaimed author, professor and political and cultural commentator. “We’re unstoppable because we come from a people who can’t be stopped,” Dr. Dyson exclaimed, adding, “they tried to stop us 400 something years ago...couldn’t stop us!”

The keynote speaker sought to impress upon the graduating class the importance of pride, hard work, perseverance, and remaining true to yourself. During his address, Dr. Dyson confidently stated, “You are unstoppable in a nation where the American empire stretched the horizon of its influence across your life but you kept understanding regardless of that, you are a proud, beautiful people. You are part of the U.S. Virgin Islands and those islands manifest the genius of blackness at its height in a society that refuses to acknowledge you as the greatness you are.” Dr. Dyson’s remarks were well received by the exuberant graduates who responded with loud applause.

Kaylor Bass, graduating Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, was selected by her peers to address them as the class speaker. It was a pleasure and an honor for her, she said, to stand before her classmates in that capacity. In her address, Ms. Bass urged her graduating colleagues to remember “you are a part of the resilient, ambitious and unstoppable class of 2023.” With a proud smile, she added, “When I first learned of the three words that would be attributed to our class it filled me with pride as they really do capture the essence of who we are as a graduating class.”

Ms. Bass’s speech touched on the nature of the challenges experienced by some of her classmates, ranging from Covid-induced difficulties to personal struggles whether they be academic, financial, physical or emotional. She concluded that their resilience, ambition and unstoppable nature is evidenced by the completion of their respective degrees – no small feat.

The commencement ceremony was well attended by a host of esteemed guests, including several lawmakers. In addressing the graduating class, Senate President Novelle E. Francis first asked the male graduates to stand, recognizing them for “showing up and showing out.” He then commended the entire graduating class for their accomplishments and underscored their importance in shaping and strengthening the territory’s future. In a passionate address, Mr. Francis shared, “Let me emphasize to you today graduates, we need you. We need you to run the companies and make crucial decisions. We need you to serve at the highest levels of government and determine our territory's standing in the Caribbean and the world.” According to the Senate president, the students’ combined intellect, perspectives and lived experiences position them to make significant contributions to their community.



Parents, guardians, family and friends celebrated with the graduates during UVI's commencement ceremony in St. Thomas on Friday, May 12 2023. (Credit: V.I. Consortium)

During Friday's commencement ceremony, an honorary degree was conferred upon Edward Thomas Sr., who the UVI President Dr. Hall described as an "exemplary public servant, outstanding business leader and anchor for economic development." Speaking on Thomas's contributions, Dr. David Hall observed, "It is common for an individual with a degree in business and economics to use his skills and degrees in the private sector to reward himself and do a little good for others. It is rare when someone uses those skills, degrees and leadership talent exclusively in service of the people, government and institutions that shaped his life."

A total of 280 undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and diplomas were awarded to students across the two ceremonies in fields including nursing, education, business, accounting, tourism management and marketing.

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