



dateline: UVI

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UVI Graduates to 'Set the World on Fire'



Derron Ambrose, left, selected as commencement speaker by his St. Thomas campus class, delivers his address. Ambrose also earned the highest grade point average in the undergraduate class. Chaselle McConnell, right, receives her degree from UVI President Dr. David Hall at the UVI Commencement ceremony on the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix. McConnell was the undergraduate student on St. Croix with the highest grade point average and the only to graduate with summa cum laude honors.



Making a difference was the collective message at UVI's 47th Annual Commencement ceremonies on St. Thomas and St. Croix, held May 14 and 15, respectively. Keynote speaker Dr. Johnetta B. Cole, gave the graduates a list of things to consider as they begin a new chapter in their lives.

"You need to get or remain passionate about learning," she said. "You can't stop learning now. At my age I'm having the time of my life, learning every day." Dr. Cole is the director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, a position she assumed in 2009. She has had a distinguished career as an educator and humanitarian and is president emerita of Bennett College for Women and Spelman College. She told the graduates to be idealistic, go above and beyond in all they do, serve others and practice tolerance.

Dr. Cole told the story of a young girl who, seeing dozens of starfish washed up on the shore, began tossing them back into the ocean, knowing that if she did not, they would die. Although the girl was told that she could never get all of them back into the ocean, she knew that she made a difference in the life of each starfish she was able to touch. "I am asking of you to model your life after that girl," Dr. Cole said. "Be idealistic. Believe that you can save all the starfish," she said.

"It's no secret that this is a difficult time to enter the workforce," said Angel Dawson, commissioner of the VI Department of Finance, who delivered remarks on behalf

of Gov. John P. deJongh Jr. "You can look at it as bad luck or as opportunity," Dawson said. "Now more than ever we need you. We need your minds, your ideas," Dawson told the graduates. The world is changing and the young at heart lead change, he said. "It is your time."

Derron Ambrose, commencement speaker on the St. Thomas campus, spoke of what it took to reach this milestone. There are many meanings attached to the word degree, said Ambrose, who earned the highest grade point average in the undergraduate class on the St. Thomas campus. A degree can be used as a measurement of angles or temperature, he noted. People sometimes refer to a college degree as a piece of paper, he said. "But to us it means more than that." Ambrose used the analogy of water in a kettle on the stove. Moving the water from 211 to 212 degrees Fahrenheit makes a big difference that creates steam, he said. Steam can then be used to create power.

"A degree for us makes a fundamental difference," Ambrose said, noting the hours of sacrifice and hard work needed year after year to pass courses in order to graduate. "We have made it," he said. "We have achieved a state of change."

UVI conferred 286 degrees, 102 on St. Croix and 184 on St. Thomas. Chaselle McConnell earned the highest grade point average in the undergraduate class on St. Croix. She was the only summa cum laude graduate in her class. McConnell hopes to make a difference by becoming a teacher and training the next generation of leaders. "I really cherish the education I received at UVI and all that I learned from my classes, the professors that

See Commencement on next page

Events Calendar

May 31-June 3 4-H Summer Registrations STT/STX
 June 23 Summer Session II Begins STT/STX

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Phonathons Help Increase Alumni Contributions by 96%

It's 5 p.m. on a Wednesday afternoon. Linda Smith, UVI's director of Annual Giving and Alumni Affairs, is busy getting final supplies for the University of the Virgin Islands 2011 Alumni Phonathon. The phonathon begins at 5:30 p.m. Smith has little time to spare, but she greets volunteers with a smile as they make their way into the conference room of the Administration and Conference Center, which was transformed into a calling center for the event.

"Putting this together has been a herculean task," Smith said later. She has put together several phonathons, but this particular one focused on special alumni – persons who attended UVI or CVI (the College of the Virgin Islands) for a minimum of 12 months, but did not graduate. Getting current information for special alumni was a challenge, Smith said. But once the phonathon began on May 23, everything went smoothly.

Commencement Continued

I had and the people that I met," McConnell said following commencement. "I really want this to be a motivation to any student," she said of her accomplishment. Dedication to course work, sacrificing time and believing that she could accomplish her goals despite the challenges she faced helped her to be top of her class. It's a model that anyone could adopt, she said. "I really want to see more summa cum laudes, magna cum laudes and cum laudes."

Sana Hamed was the commencement speaker on St. Croix.



Reichbold Center for the Arts Marketing Manager Karen Gutloff, center, volunteers at the 2011 Alumni Phonathon, held May 23-26 on UVI's St. Thomas campus. In the background are UVI's Comptroller Peggy Smith, left, and Director of Advancement Services and Scholarships Ardrina Scott-Elliott.

"The majority of the responses have been favorable," Smith said. "They embrace the ideals of UVI," she added, noting that many of the special alumni encouraged UVI to reach out to even more special alumni by sharing names and contact information. While this phase was primarily to regain contact with special alumni, some of them even pledged donations, Smith said.

This is part two of an earlier calling campaign started in March. Utilizing a national calling program, the March campaign focused on traditional alumni – those who earned degrees from UVI – and has

increased the alumni giving rate by 96 percent. "This is historic," she said of the jump in the alumni giving rate, "especially in this economic time."

Smith said phase three of the phonathon will continue in August, in an effort to reach out to more special alumni.

UVI President Dr. David Hall congratulated the graduates, who he said are destined to set the world on fire. "Many of you came through circumstances that may have crushed others," Dr. Hall said. "This is your launch, not your landing."

"I, as president, charge you to go out into the world and make it a better place," Dr. Hall said in closing.

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