



dateline: UVI

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AIDS Activist Shares Her Story with Students

Through entertaining and honest discussion AIDS activist Rae Lewis-Thornton shared her personal story about living with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. She told her story to UVI and high school students from across St. Thomas.

Lewis-Thornton was the featured speaker during a day-long conference on HIV/AIDS entitled "Promoting Prevention in Paradise: Youth Taking Control," held on UVI's St. Thomas campus Oct. 2.

Lewis-Thornton, who is based in Chicago, was one of the first African American women to share her story with a major publication when she appeared on the cover of *Essence* magazine in 1994.

"You don't see AIDS when you look at me but it's real," Lewis-Thornton repeated throughout her presentation. "I look good. I'm fancy and stuff, but AIDS is the

hardest thing I've had to deal with," she said. "My Chanel handbag over here does not reduce my pill load. I still have to take 15 pills a day."

Lewis-Thornton, a college-educated, magna cum laude graduate, said she had not used drugs, alcohol or cigarettes in her whole life. She said she never had sex on the first night and never had a one-night-stand. Yet she contracted HIV.

While she never knew for sure who infected her, Lewis-Thornton said she has to live with the consequences of having un-

protected sex. "I had a choice," she said. She encouraged members of the audience to think of the consequences of their behavior before each sexual act.

Lewis-Thornton detailed how she has managed living with the disease for 26 years, including the toll it has taken on her body. She also explained the ways HIV can be transmitted and encouraged everyone to use condoms



AIDS Activist Rae Lewis-Thornton addresses the audience on Oct. 2, on UVI's St. Thomas campus.

and to use them correctly.

The AIDS activist stressed that she cannot save anyone's life; it's up to each person to protect themselves.

"You have got to take this information and use it," she said. The conference was sponsored by UVI's St. Thomas campus Office of the Associate Campus Executive Administrator for Student Affairs, with support from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, through the Minority Education Institution Initiative.

Paradise Jam 2009

Paradise Jam opens Nov. 20, at UVI's Sports and Fitness Center on St. Thomas, with 16 NCAA Division I basketball teams – eight men's and eight women's – participating. The men's championship is on Nov. 23, the women's is on Nov. 28. During the tourney, UVI's Bucs men's team will host LAI rivals Metropolitan in a game on Nov. 21.

For details visit
www.paradisejam.com



World Food Day

Dr. Jeff Keularts, left, and Olasee Davis from UVI's Cooperative Extension Service distribute vegetable seedlings to World Food Day participants. Three thousand seedlings were distributed on Sunday, Oct. 18, on the St. Croix campus.

Events Calendar

Oct. 31	Board of Trustees Meeting	STX
Nov. 5	English Proficiency Exam	STT/STX
Nov. 14	Puerto Rico Symphony	STT
Nov. 20-28	Paradise Jam	STT
Nov. 21	Computer Literacy Exam	STX
Nov. 24	Computer Literacy Exam	STT

CERC Holds 2nd Annual Health Disparities Conference

Health care professionals working with the Caribbean Exploratory NCMHD Research Center for Excellence (CERC) held a two-day conference at the St. John Westin Resort Oct. 15-16.

“Bridging Science, Practice and Culture to Improve Health in the U.S. Virgin Islands” was the theme of the 2nd Annual Health Disparities Institute. Organizers said they want to take what experts know about health disparities among persons of color and convert those facts into common knowledge.

“A very sparse literature suggests that residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands are burdened with the same health disparities identified in health disparity populations on the U.S. mainland,” the program booklet said. Virgin Islanders largely face the same challenges; finding health care, paying for health care, knowing when they need it and finding health care that speaks to them no matter what language they’re speaking.

Dr. Gloria Callwood, Principal Investigator for CERC and former Chair of the UVI Nursing Education Division, urged everyone to play a role in bridging the health care gap in the territory.

UVI President Dr. David Hall spoke at the conference. “The importance of this topic and the focus of this institute cannot be overstated ... I believe disparities in health and in educational achievement are the new civil



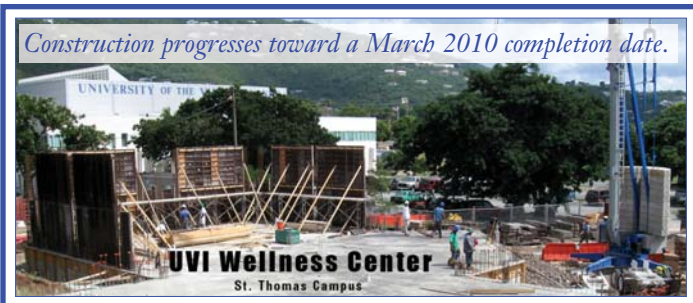
Ambassador Margaret Heckler, left, and Dr. Gloria Callwood

rights agenda for this generation of scholars and activists,” he said.

Over the course of two days the group was addressed by three distinguished leaders. U.S. Ambassador Margaret Heckler was once the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services. She directed the first national study on health disparities. UVI alumna Dr. Safiya George Dalmida addressed the topic of HIV disease and how mental and social influences affect the immune system. Dr. Fatimah L.C. Jackson shared her knowledge of metabolic biology and the link between cultural practices and health.

Dr. Callwood said she hoped the workshops and speakers presented at the Health Disparities Institute would encourage those who took part to influence national policies on health and help promote a meaningful debate about health care reform.

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