



# UVI Alumni Chronicles

University of the Virgin Islands

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## UVI Alumni Achieve Highest Contribution Rate among HBCUs

The University of the Virgin Islands' alumni have once again risen to the challenge. In fiscal year 2013-2014, the alumni giving rate rose to 52.49 percent. "We are number one," said University of the Virgin Islands President David Hall at the 2014 alumni celebration on the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix. This is the highest alumni contribution rate of any Historically Black College and University in the nation, said Dr. Hall. "There is no HBCU that has numbers like this," he said. "If you go outside the HBCU realm, there are very few institutions that go beyond 52 percent."

UVI alumni first made history when they increased the alumni giving rate from six percent to 42

percent, which was a 223 percent increase over previous years. As a result, UVI's alumni received the 2013 Historically Black Colleges and Uni-

*"The community has rallied around initiatives and campaigns and they have provided us with support – helping us to reach and maintain our historic goals. -Linda I. Smith*

versities Alumni Association of the Year award. In 2013, UVI's alumni reached an alumni giving rate of 51.73 percent.

"If the alumni feel that the institution has assisted them in achieving their dreams, then they give back to the institution," said Dr. Hall. "When alumni believe that the institution is continuing to invest in students and doing a very good job nurturing the

next generation, then they give back. That is why it is used as a measure of where the institution stands."

"As the only HBCU in the Caribbe-

an, the community has rallied around initiatives and campaigns and they have provided us with support – helping us to reach and maintain our historic goals," said UVI Director of Annual Giving and Alumni Affairs Linda I. Smith, class of 1998 and 2003, who has headed up the alumni contribution effort for the past several years.

Alumni throughout the Eastern Caribbean region under the leadership of UVI's Dedicated Alumni Recruitment Teams and those in the United States mainland played a significant role in this accomplishment, she said. "To everyone who believes in paying it forward or giving back, we thank you for believing and making a difference in the lives of our students. This is our hometown University."

"We need to remember to support our HBCU's because they were created to continue to afford us the



Dear Alumni and Friends,

Fiscal Year 2013-2014 was dynamic for UVI. We are number one! The UVI "First to 50 Challenge: Reloaded" campaign ended with an alumni participation rate of 52.49 percent. Congratulations UVI alumni. This year's campaign, "First to 50 Champions: Back in the Winner's Circle," was successfully launched on Oct. 1.

This edition of the Alumni Chronicles Newsletter recaps our historic journey over the past year. Proudly, our Miss UVI Elisa Thomas, '16, tells her story of winning the national title of Miss National Black College Alumni Hall of Fame. Also, the dynamic Chawnique Schjang, '14, shares her passion of service beyond self in the UVI Alumni Affairs office. In 2015, stay connected as the School of Nursing launches "Celebrate 50 Years of Nursing Education" with events throughout the year.

Thank you for your valued support.

Happy Holidays to you and those you hold dear.

Linda I. Smith '98, '03

Director of Annual Giving and Alumni Affairs  
lsmith@live.uvi.edu



UVI alumni and friends celebrate in the Administration and Conference Center on the St. Thomas Campus.

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right to a quality education at an affordable and competitive price, while being globally sensitive and steeped in our distinct history,” said Miss UVI Elisa Thomas, who was crowned Miss National Black College Alumni Hall of Fame in September 2014. “While the 105 HBCUs represent just three percent of the nation’s institutions of higher learning, they graduate nearly one-quarter of African Americans who earn undergraduate degrees. HBCUs graduate 75 percent more of their African American students than other schools do,” Thomas said.

“First to 50 Champions Back in the Winner’s Circle” was selected as the fiscal year 2014-2015 alumni challenge theme. The 2015 challenge is the most important, as the University must maintain three consistent years of 50 percent or greater for the historic record to be officially noted within the annals of history, said Smith. The new theme was selected as part of a contest. UVI alumna Lorna Chesterfield, ’94, won two tickets to see Kirk Franklin perform at the Reichhold Center for the Arts on Feb. 7, for her winning submission.



## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

*Chawnique Schjang*

As an undergraduate student, Chawnique Schjang watched as the University of the Virgin Islands continued to evolve to offer improved services, enhance classroom facilities and add more degree programs. Now, she has returned to her alma mater as a UVI employee to do her part to make this University great.

“I am proud that a small University, like ours, is doing great things,” said Schjang, who earned a bachelor’s degree in biology in 2014.

She is excited that UVI is in the process of creating a School of Medicine and grateful to be part of the Alumni Affairs team that worked with the community to make the University’s alumni contribution rate the highest among Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Schjang worked with Linda I. Smith, director of Annual Giving and Alumni Affairs, to raise the giving rate to 52.49 percent in fiscal year 2013-2014.

*I am proud that a small University, like ours, is doing great things!* —Chawnique Schjang

Her job title at UVI is administrative assistant, but she faced her fears to go above and beyond her job description. “It might not seem so, but I am a very quiet and shy person,”

## Chawnique Schjang: UVI Alumna Returns to Alma Mater to Make a Difference

said Schjang. “Fundraising and being out there saying ‘give back to UVI’ and trying to ask people for money is kind of hard for me.”

Schjang said that her supervisor, Smith, told her it’s not just asking for money. “Ms. Smith said talk to our alumni and friends and tell them all the wonderful things that UVI does and what their donation can

U.S. Virgin Islands and British Virgin Islands Friendship Day on Oct. 18. Later that day, she and Smith raised funds at the Tessanne Chin and Pressure show at the Reichhold Center for the Arts. “The solicitations there were amazing,” she said. “I can’t even believe how much funding we raised in that one day.” Schjang continued, “It was very fun and I met a lot of people.



*Chawnique Schjang (left) is interviewed by radio show host Anita Davis at a live remote broadcast of the 2014 Alumni Phonathon.*

do to help,” she said. After a few trial runs and observing Smith in action, Schjang got an opportunity to prove herself when she fundraised on her own when her supervisor was off island attending another UVI event.

I connected with a lot of alumni and friends. Now when they see me, they stop me and say hi.”

In May of 2014, Schjang made her first donation to her alma mater, as a member of her class. Now, she is planning to secure her annual gift to UVI, but is caught between donating to the biology program – which has a special place in her heart – or giving to whatever area at UVI that has the greatest need. One thing she knows for sure is that she will make a gift.

Since then, Schjang has solicited donations throughout the territory and on other islands in the Caribbean.

Her most memorable day was fundraising at the observation of the





MISS UVI & MISS NBCA  
*Elisa Thomas*

## Miss UVI is First to Bring Home National Hall of Fame Crown

pride,” Thomas said.

“We are elated Elisa will be representing our HBCUs during the next twelve months as Miss Hall of Fame,” said Thomas Dortch, Jr., NBCA Hall of Fame Foundation founder and board chairman. “She has proven herself to be very capable of conveying the message of educational excellence that our HBCUs send.”

the “Building Blocks of Empowerment,” become a published writer and start a college fund for students in need of financial assistance. “I just think it’s imperative that we always ask ourselves what we can do for others, because any of us would not be where we are today if it wasn’t for someone assisting us along the way,” she said.

Her dream was to be crowned queen in her first national competition. Elisa Thomas had been crowned princess many times as a young girl. As a teen, she was crowned carnival queen and Miss Charlotte Amalie High School. In college, she competed against six other young ladies for the Miss UVI title and won. On Sept. 27, Thomas made history when she was crowned Miss National Black College Alumni (NBCA) Hall of Fame – becoming the first Miss UVI to win that crown – and fulfilling her dream.

“Being crowned Miss National Black College Alumni Hall of Fame is an amazing feeling,” said Thomas. “To hear my name and school be called literally brought tears to my eyes. I’m proud that I was able to achieve this national recognition not only for the prestigious University of the Virgin Islands, but also for the United States Virgin Islands.” Twenty other college queens competed for the title. Thomas also walked away with a win in the “Hats and Heels” segment of the competition.

“I’m honored to represent an organization geared toward the relevance of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, promoting African American achievement, individual school pride and collective HBCU



*Miss UVI Elisa Thomas, who was crowned Miss National Black College Alumni Hall of Fame, (foreground) stands with her court at the black college queens competition in Atlanta, Ga.*

“I am extremely proud of Elisa Thomas, Miss UVI, for achieving this outstanding honor of being selected as Miss National Black College Alumni Hall of Fame,” said UVI President Dr. David Hall. “She represented UVI in an excellent way, and now she will represent Historically Black Colleges and Universities.” He continued, “Elisa’s accomplishment is a compelling reminder that UVI prepares our students to take on and lead the world.”

Thomas is a communication major at UVI and plans to own and host her own talk show. She also wants to start an organization geared toward pre-adolescent girls entitled

During her reign as Miss NBCA Hall of Fame, Thomas plans to be an advocate promoting the importance of HBCU’s, serve as an effective panelist at the various seminars, campus tours and the events she attends. She will also promote more awareness and measures to prevent domestic violence. Her platform as Miss UVI and Miss NBCA Hall of Fame is “Combatting Domestic Violence by Building Stronger Women from a Young Age.” “If I’m able to positively influence at least one person, then I feel I have efficiently carried out my duty as a true queen – a humble servant,” said Thomas.



Kevin Dixon ‘14, former Student Government Association president on the Albert A. Sheen Campus, was selected to participate in the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Fall 2014 Emerging Leaders Program. He was placed in United States Congress Senator Dianne Feinstein’s Office in Washington, D.C.

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with any questions.

## Best of the Best

We asked UVI Alumni on Facebook to identify their favorite Miss UVI queen.

*This is what they said:*

*“Judy Duncan”* - Norman Edwards Jr., BA in business 1996, St. Thomas Campus

*“Duncan – a Cobra!!”* - Ester Boatswain, BA in business 2002, Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix

*“Carice Carice!!!!”* - Thia Homer, BS in mathematics 2014, St. Thomas Campus

*“Sharifa Maloney!”* - St. Clair Hodge, BA business marketing 2010, St. Thomas Campus

*“Judy Duncan all the way”* - Antoinette Boissiere, BA in education 2004, Albert A. Sheen Campus

*“Judy Duncan ‘93!”* - Maureen Lloyd Rigaudon, BA in business 1997, St. Thomas Campus



## Where are They Now?

*Can you name the alumna in this photo, the year and where this photo was taken?*

## Did You Know

Did you know that the University of the Virgin Islands nursing program will celebrate 50 years of nursing education. The College of the Virgin Islands, as UVI was originally named, began its nursing program in 1965, with 25 students.

Dr. Judith Grybowski, UVI professor emerita, is leading the effort to reunite UVI's nursing alumni, faculty and friends. Events are being scheduled for May 15-16, 2015, on St. Thomas and May 17-18, 2015, on St. Croix. The theme is “Caring and Making a Difference.”

Interested class members are asked to contact Dr. Grybowski by email at [judithagybs2@gmail.com](mailto:judithagybs2@gmail.com) or call (340) 775-6349 or (843) 822-2258.

