

Tuesday, March 16, 2003

President's Charter Day Message

Dr. LaVerne E. Ragster

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This is the text of President Ragster's address on Charter Day 2004.

Good Morning to all of the UVI family and happy anniversary!

It is with great pleasure that I say a special good morning to the members of the Board of Trustees present, Dr. Eustace Esdaille and Mr. Alexander Moorhead, and to our guests and the media. Thank you Pastor Gumbs.

I stand before you today with a feeling of great joy and a sense of awe for the unfolding dream we call the University of the Virgin Islands. Forty-two years ago on this day the College of the Virgin Islands (CVI) was officially created by the USVI Legislature and our territory and the region have not been the same since that day.

What former Governor Paiewonsky, Dr. Howard Jones, Mrs. Eldra Schulerbrandt, Leon Hess, Henry Reichhold, Judge Herman Moore and young educators Orville Kean and Marilyn Krigger and others saw in 1962 when they examined this bold initiative was a better, more enlightened future for the people of the VI. The possibility of building a middle class populated with Virgin Islanders and other Caribbean people and the potential to drive and support economic development in the Territory were exciting aspects of the vision for CVI.

The following four decades of building structures, establishing academic and other programs, as well as building student and alumni populations were guided and lead by Presidents Lawrence Wanlass, Arthur Richards and Orville Kean. These gentlemen stayed focused on the mission of the institution - to meet the higher education needs of the people of the USVI and wider Caribbean; to offer degrees and continuing education programs in support of productive, responsible citizenship, and to be a major provider of intellectual capital through the integration of teaching research and public service activities.

Each president could be seen to have a different focus depending on the needs of the institution and the community at the time. President Wanlass (1963-1978) established the first faculty and staff group and secured our first physical and institutional structures. (Melvin Evans Center completed in 1975, land grant status in 1972, Middle States accreditation in 1970, MAE 1973, Title 111 in 1966) President Richards' term responded with enthusiasm to the requirements for academic quality, academic standards and new programs to meet identified degree needs -- (Reichhold Center dedicated, MPA, BS, ECC established, MacLean Marine Center, and NSE in 1981). President Kean met the challenge to lead the institution through a decade of hurricane and

economic downturn and recovery (rebuilding both campuses, SFC, Great House, Music Building, dormitories STC, videoconferencing increased, RTPark, reduced hazard risks to infrastructure, increased student research, strategic planning).

In our last five years we have addressed the need to improve administrative structures, and focused on building revenue streams over which we have more control.

As the fourth president of this wonderful vehicle of people development called UVI it has been my challenge to continue to implement our strategic plan of 2000-05 with the vision also focusing on excellence in collaboration and customer service. The need to increase our revenue streams has focused on enrollment increases, workforce training and implementation of the Research and Technology Park. In this period of our history we have been spending more time on cultivating partners and support for programs and initiatives in the community and in the private and public sectors.

Our academic and research programs have and will continue to be assessed for relevancy, fit to mission and cost effectiveness. We are now an institution that works harder than ever before at getting our message and accomplishments out to our partners and the public.

The UVI of 2004 is an institution that is focusing more on its impact and how close we come to meeting the goals and objectives we set. We continue to be more innovative each time a new challenge occurs - innovative approaches to teaching and learning, creative approaches to administrative efficiency, more sophisticated approaches toward meeting financial needs. This type of approach to development is to be expected and hoped for in a learning institution.

I am proud to say that we are showing many signs of becoming a mature learning organization. As you are all aware we will not be able to realize our vision to be recognized as a leading higher education American institution in the Caribbean dedicated to playing a significant role in facilitating economic and social transformation of the VI to meet the challenges of the 21st Century if we do not focus on the same goals despite different perspectives and remember why we are here.

The whole point of these remarks today is to remind all of us of that the last 42 years of hard work, challenges, wonderful successes and heartening stories happened because each faculty member, staff person, student, each employee, every Board contributed in some way to the impact CVI/UVI has had on the systems, institutions and, most of all, the people of the territory and the rest of the Caribbean.

Charter Day is a day to remember all the shoulders we stand on and acknowledge that we are all a part of the realization of a fantastic vision for a people. Our responsibility continues to be great and I dare say the payoff of being a part of proving what amounts to tangible hope for the future is outstanding. I congratulate and thank you all on behalf of the Board of Trustees, the more than 5,700 UVI alumni and this community for your dedication and contributions to the success of this great institution.

The UVI of tomorrow will be involved and leading the development of the technology sector for the territory and the region, it will be providing a range of workforce training programs to the public and private sectors, it will be involved in sports tourism and provide technical assistance to government agencies, it will be the most sought-after partner in the Territory for collaboration

that involves knowledge sharing and discovery.

UVI of tomorrow will specialize in futures that begin today with our constantly improving degree programs.

Colleagues and friends permit me to show you where the UVI of tomorrow is today and why I have such confidence in the future of the institution and for our community.

Would members of the Cabinet please stand, followed by academic support and faculty (associate chancellors, counselors, AD, coaches, enrollment management, upward bound, library, information technology), student life/affairs, research faculty and professional staff, public service and outreach professionals (CELL,RPS), financial management, institutional research, sponsored programs, campus administration, physical plant, institutional advancement, RTP, Board members. Students, alumni The future is ours to make.

Happy anniversary to UVI and Happy anniversary to us all.
