

# Building futures: UVICELL expands Frederiksted Resource Center to offer more services to community

TOM EADER

ST. CROIX — Residents who live on the West End or anywhere on island will have greater opportunities to receive education and training in areas such as workforce development and personal enrichment now that the University of the Virgin Islands has expanded its Community Engagement and Lifelong Learning Center's presence in Frederiksted.

The expansion of the center comes at a time when additional resources in the area of job training and workforce development are vital to sustain the island's economy considering the ripple effects from the closure of the Hovensa oil refinery in April are still being felt.

UVICELL opened its Frederiksted Resource Center located at 23A Hospital Street in 2007 after receiving a Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCU) grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the amount of \$541,000. UVICELL celebrated the completion and rededication of its newly expanded Frederiksted Resource Center during a ceremony Thursday. The expansion of the center, which was completed in August and includes more office space, computer labs and training and testing areas, was made possible by another HUD-HBCU grant in the amount of \$794,220.

"We are extremely excited about the completion of this project as it will open up so many more possibilities for the town of Frederiksted," UVICELL Director Ilene Garner said in a statement. "As a result of the expansion, we can better support entrepreneurial activity, job services and provide training in high-



The University of the Virgin Islands' Community Engagement and Lifelong Learning Center held a rededication ceremony for its Frederiksted Resource Center on Thursday that included a tour taken by community partners involved in the renovation project as well as UVICELL board members and staff.

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demand and emerging occupations to the historic town."

UVI applied for its first HUD grant in 2003 in an effort to establish a community-based learning center in Frederiksted as well as help revitalize the rundown buildings in town. The project brought a number of strategic partners to the table including a local benefactor who deeded the property to Our Town Frederiksted, as well as the Public Finance Authority, the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources' Community Development Block Grant and the West Indian Company Limited.

After K&E Construction completed renovations to the two-story building, the center opened in 2007 and housed offices for Our Town Frederiksted in addition to providing classrooms for UVICELL. The expansion of the center added 1,600 square feet of space that will not only provide more access for the physically challenged, but also offer

enhanced services to the entire community. Garner said UVICELL wanted its Frederiksted Resource Center to be located in an area where it could really have an impact on the community.

And some of the services the center offers the community include courses and programs in the areas of corporate training, professional development, workforce development, consulting and professional services and personal enrichment. Therefore, residents can learn how to improve their employability and job performance by engaging in such programs as human resource management, basic web design, real estate, essentials of business writing, certified public accountant review course, hospitality and tourism, customer service, workplace readiness skills, computer training and certification, massage therapy, cake decorating, floral design, learning a foreign language and more.

UVICELL also is partnering with

the Virgin Islands Small Business Development Center and the Virgin Islands Department of Labor to offer even more services. Representatives from both entities spoke during the ceremony.

Garner said UVICELL will network with the SBDC so its clients will have an opportunity to receive entrepreneurial training from SBDC in addition to the services offered by UVICELL.

Karen Jones, director of the SBDC service center on St. Croix, said the SBDC actually will provide services at the center. She said the SBDC is committed to working with the clientele of UVICELL and providing outreach to the community.

"Our mission is to provide and foster economic development through entrepreneurship and creation of small business," she said.

Garner said UVICELL also will be partnering with the DOL. She said her staff will be able to do partial intake of DOL clients and offer

them services to include skills assessment testing and job training.

"We are going to be serving as an access point for the Department of Labor," she said.

Arah Lockhart, UVICELL advisory board member and VI Department of Labor assistant commissioner for Employment and Training, said the DOL envisions the Frederiksted Resource Center as being a gateway for one-stop access. She said the U.S. Department of Labor, through its Workforce Investment program, has encouraged many recipients of Workforce Investment funds, including the Virgin Islands Department of Labor, to expand its opportunities for services. She said the Frederiksted Resource Center will serve as a DOL access point so residents can access information about job opportunities and workforce training, as well as learn more about other DOL programs.

"This brings us in alignment with the national initiative to provide career preparation services," Lockhart said, adding the DOL will open access points at two housing communities on St. Croix (Aureo Diaz Heights and Marley Homes) and two on St. Thomas (Bovoni and Oswald Harris Court) in January 2013.

Garner offered welcoming remarks during the ceremony, recognizing the community partners involved in the renovation project as well as UVICELL board members and staff. Other speakers included Nereida Washington, UVI director of operations on St. Croix; Alphonso Franklin, president of Our Town Frederiksted; Adel Soto, executive director of the Workforce Investment Board; Senate President Ronald Russell; and Sen. Samuel Sanes.