



**UNION of JAMAICAN ALUMNI ASSOCIATIONS U.S.A., Inc.**  
1452 President Street, Brooklyn, NY 11213 - 347.927.3606 [www.ujaausa.org](http://www.ujaausa.org)

*Over Two Decades of ~ Dedication ~ Commitment ~ Service*

**EDUCATION IS EMPOWERMENT, ONLY THE EDUCATED ARE FREE**

## 2018 – 2019 PRESIDENT’S REPORT

Annual General Meeting

11 September 2019

The UJAA Leadership team began 2018 with reflection. The great poet Maya Angelou said, “If you don’t know where you’ve come from, you don’t know where you’re going.” During a series of meetings across a few months, the team took some time to reflect – to understand where we are, and how we got here. And from there, we developed a 19 point plan for where we want to go. The plan was grouped into 5 categories:

- Our Brand – improving and enhancing it
- Our Membership – growing our membership and helping our current members to grow as well
- Our Funding – understanding our funding mechanisms and developing new ways for funding our projects
- Our Programs – developing new ways to include our young people
- Our Operations – completing Standard Operating Procedures, and revitalizing several committees including Building and Finance committees, as well as our Advisory Board.

Throughout the year, then, we paused to reflect – to ensure that we were staying true to our vision for growth and development. Through this report, we once again take stock on our achievements, our challenges and our opportunities for improvement.

Our report from our Public Relations team illustrates the progress that we have made is building our brand. The team, under the co-leadership of Assistant Treasurer Wilbert Davis and Director Karlene Largie, developed a rhythm for sharing and supporting our work with our community – both here in the USA, as well as in Jamaica. We cemented partnerships with both radio and print media who assisted us in promoting our core events, as well as our involvement in Diaspora initiatives. Our participation in the 8<sup>th</sup> Biennial Diaspora Conference – providing the welcome address on behalf of the Diaspora at the conference’s opening ceremony, our participation in the Education Plenary, and our presence in the Marketplace – underscores the growing impact of our UJAA Brand. We assisted in concrete ways with the implementation of several initiatives both here in the NY area – for example, the Math Club’s Martin Luther King Day Mathematics Competition, and in the Diaspora, for example - the Jamaica Diaspora NE Leadership Summit in Morrow, Georgia. In keeping with our belief in collaboration, we donated to and/or attended a plethora of events and programs throughout the year. My thanks to the Public Relations team as well as the UJAA Board of Directors for their commitment to this important aspect of our strategic plan. As we go forward, with vigilance and dedication, we will monitor these approaches to ensure that we continue to obtain the desired effect of our efforts.

For the first time in eight years that we've been actively tracking our membership dues payments, we achieved a milestone in July 2019 when the dues for all 54 member organizations was paid for the fiscal year. 87% of the organizations paid within the first three months of the year. This is reflective, I believe, of an increased understanding of our organizations as businesses, and acknowledgement of the need to meet our commitments in a timely way. Thank you for helping us make this milestone achievement. I hope that you join us in our goal of having this result be the norm, instead of the exception, in years to come.

This year, we revisited our building initiative that began many years ago. Under the leadership of Vice President, Donovan Wilson, we developed a clear understanding of what is required for us to own a building in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Two teams were identified by the team as required to be established if owning a building is to be a priority of UJAA over the next 3 to 5 years. I look forward to us putting these teams in place and to moving that initiative forward.

As we look to grow and change our funding mechanisms within UJAA, we will need to develop better methods of understanding our sources and uses of funds. "If we are to know where we're going, we must know where we've been." I look forward to the working with our Finance Committee to aid the UJAA leadership team in this area.

UJAA's programs have proven to be our bedrock. We continued our expanded involvement in the Math Club's MLKing Program, contributed 7 water tanks to needed schools, and continued our support as the administrator of the Vincent HoSang Family Foundation's Scholarship program.

Our Robotics initiatives continued this year. JCOBA's vision of 10 years ago was realized with the establishment of the FIRST Technology Challenge local competition in Jamaica with 18 schools participating. Congratulations to the JCOBA team for their vision and tenacity in realizing this goal. We increased our support of the Red Springs Robotics Competition, and are poised to visit Dubai in the United Arab Emirates as a participant, for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, in the FIRST Global Challenge in October of this year. The extraordinary financial support by Jamaica's Ministry of Education, Youth and Information this year underscores their recognition of UJAA's commitment to this opportunity for our students - as global citizens equipped to tackle the challenges of our world, and to the potential impact on our country. We are thankful for this recognition, and are mindful of the responsibility and accountability that comes with this support.

We continued of support of Operation Restoration Christian School by assisting with bathroom renovations and roof repair, funded their summer program, and provided a large barrel of new clothing and supplies.

Our High School Graduate awards program once again brought the phenomenal achievements of our young people to the fore. Our inclusion of our HSGA Alums in the program paves the way for the development of an initiative that continues to engage these young people in our

work and in our connections to Jamaica. I am excited about the possibilities that this opportunity affords, and welcome your ideas for growing the involvement of our young persons.

UJAA's support of the Alliance of Jamaican Alumni Association's Emerging Global Leaders – Jamaica program has opened yet another door for involvement with our students both in Jamaica as well as from the greater NYC area. This year, our EGL team of Clair Menzies, Michael Salmon, Barbara Lewis and Evelyn Godden allowed us to expand our participation in this program by selecting two phenomenal students – Samantha Matthews and Danel Powell - who, with Ms. Menzies as chaperone, participated in the EGLJ program at Knox College in Clarendon in July. As we heard from the students, it was a life-changing experience. My sincere thanks to the team who guided us through this new process and establishing the platform for growing this initiative. Congratulations and thank you also to Michael Salmon who was a keynote presenter at this year's EGL-J Program. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with AJAA, as well as our expanding our involvement with this program by promoting the development of more of our young people, and to learning and growing with them.

Our 2019 Mega Raffle provided record levels of participation and fundraising for us. We have outgrown our venue and our drum (once again) and will be looking to change those aspects of the project for 2020. Our Penn Relays Bus Ride fundraiser continued its record of success, as was our Annual Service of Thanksgiving that included songs of praise by Andrew Clarke of Braata Productions and Derek Warmington of Mico Old Students Association. I am grateful that these gentlemen chose to share their gifts with us and look forward to enjoying their talents in times to come.

Our commitment to our Industry Cove Basic School in Hanover has not waned as we continued our support with school supplies and Friday uniforms, and funded and supervised the necessary improvements needed by the school to be certified by Jamaica's Early Childhood Commission. We are hopeful for certification by December 2019. Our Primary Schools Team continued their Gurian Institute Training initiative. We look forward to hearing more from this team in the near future.

Our 2<sup>nd</sup> New Year's Eve Ball, although not a financial success, provided a souvenir "year-in-review" journal that documents the outstanding contributions of our organizations – individually and collectively. This documentation allowed many of you to readily participate in the Gleaner Company's Special Alumni Feature in early March. While the ball will not continue, the Year-In-Review initiative is being planned, particularly as we approach our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations in the coming year.

In the area of UJAA operations, we've seen improvements on several fronts. Our membership team has developed a process for automated dues notices, and will be updating/changing our website within the next few months. A Hospitality team, led by Melanie Forrest-George, is now in place for managing the refreshments that have become the norm at our meetings. While the development of our financial SOPs has been slow, we've made good progress in documenting

the processes for managing several of our major projects. Many thanks to Natasha Davids and Karlene Largie who made major contributions to this initiative.

Our efforts to establish a UJAA Advisory Board have not yet borne fruit. But we will continue to search for those willing individuals who are interested and committed to helping us to grow and enhance UJAA.

Finally, our Presidents' Roundtable meetings has afforded us time together and real discussion. There are rarely enough hours in the day for these meetings. They continue to provide an opportunity for us to learn and grow together, and to collaborate in more meaningful ways. I appreciated the constructive feedback that we've received regarding these meetings and hope to continue to keep them relevant and productive. Our thanks for your continued active participation and involvement.

In closing, my sincere thanks to the UJAA Board of Directors who worked hard with me - sometimes late into the night - to do the work of UJAA. Even after 5 years, I remain in awe of the depth and breadth of our work and the difference that we make in the lives of our schools, our island home, our communities here in NY and each other. Sincere thanks also to the member organizations who attended our meetings, who invited UJAA to celebrate your dinner dances, boat rides, and reunions with you, and for your feedback and support. As I enter my final year as president, I am excited to work with the 2019-2020 Board of Directors to continue our record of achievement. There is more that we can do. So, let's join hands and do this! As we look forward to our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, let's consider the challenges before us – at our schools, our island home as well as those of our Diaspora. Let's continue our efforts and step up our game. And let's remember always, that "Education is empowerment; only the educated are free."

Respectfully submitted,

*Lesleyann Samuel*

Lesleyann Samuel

President

11 September 2019