



UNION of JAMAICAN ALUMNI ASSOCIATIONS U.S.A., Inc.
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Three Decades of ~ Dedication ~ Commitment ~ Service

EDUCATION IS EMPOWERMENT, ONLY THE EDUCATED ARE FREE

2020 – 2021 PRESIDENT’S REPORT

Annual General Meeting

14th September 2021

On the wall in front of my desk in my office is a small poster of the first black and youngest youth poet laureate, Amanda Norman who stole the show at the inauguration of President Biden and Vice President Harris with her poem, “The Hill We Climb.” Her poem ends with these words: ***“There is always light, if only we’re brave enough to see it. If only we are brave enough to be it.”***

Some of you may recall that I ended our January General Meeting with these profound words. To say that they resonated with me would be an understatement. And although they did not come until after our year had begun, I believe “light” has permeated in and through UJAA during this past year.

The UJAA video that we just saw captures the ***light*** that UJAA has cast over the past 30 years. In less than 5 minutes, we attempted to convey the depth and breadth of our work. I hope that you each feel the sense of pride of accomplishment of who are and what we’ve achieved as organizations of predominately volunteers. But as we say in the video, it is difficult to capture it all in just a few minutes. I feel the same challenge tonight. So, please reflect along with me over UJAA’s past year of growth and achievement.

We began our year fully embroiled in the *new normal* thrust on us by the coronavirus pandemic. Dinner dances and face-to-face meetings were swiftly replaced by virtual fundraisers and Zoom meetings. We experimented with technology via hybrid events. We learned the value and the challenges of an online environment, and came to understand the value of caring for our mental as well as physical and spiritual health, and the importance of all of our senses ... especially touch. But through it all, we learned a lot and even had some fun.

During our fiscal year 2020 – 2021, UJAA continued most of our programs. We:

- Held our 12th Annual Service of Thanksgiving as an online event
- Issued our 2020 Year-In-Review Journal (see our website)
- Hosted our 31st Annual High School Graduate Awards as a hybrid event

- Held our 25th Mega Raffle Drawing outside at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church
- Continued our support of Industry Cove School and Operation Restoration Christian School as well as the Robotics programs for our high school students
- Donated 15 Water Tanks to schools as we celebrated our 15th Anniversary of our Water Tank Project
- Held our monthly Board of Director’s Meetings, bi-monthly General Meetings, and quarterly Presidents’ Roundtables.

The details of these accomplishments are included in the 30+ pages of the Annual Reports of our 30+ committees which was distributed.

The pandemic forced the cancellation of the Math Club’s Annual Mathematics Competition. But that cancellation afforded a new look at that program, and alternative approaches are being considered. The pandemic also changed the way that some programs were hosted, but hosted nevertheless. The Emerging Global Leaders Program, for example, went virtual with online mini-conferences, as did the Annual Education Fair hosted by the Jamaica Alumni Associations of High Schools in collaboration with the Alliance of Jamaican Alumni Associations in Canada and UJAA over 2 afternoons.

Several significant initiatives and committees took flight this year and brought *light* from new directions. Our Primary Schools team under the leadership of UJAA Director Evelyn Godden collaborated with fundraisers and projects. Although their robotics initiative was placed on hold, they forged a partnership with Caribbean eBook Limited to purchase over 100 Learnit Tables for 5 pilot schools, and their Adopt-A-School Program has been formally organized and is on the verge of implementation. We look forward to the continued growth of this team as they explore news ways for providing assistance and support to our young students.

As a follow-on to our program during the spring and summer of 2020, we collaborated with the Lasco Chin Foundation to provide COVID Care Packages to the families of our schools with our Christmas, Easter and Spring Programs. Vice President Donovan Wilson lead our Laptop and Tablet Initiative which saw the donation of over \$75,000 spent for devices for 17 schools. He also lead our Technical Schools team, our newly formed Leadership Development Team and our Building Committee, and established the UJAA History Team to document UJAA’s 30 year history while we still can.

Under the leadership of appointed UJAA Director Dwight Clarke, the Membership Team came together to focus on you – to enhance your membership experience and assure equality and equity for all, as well as care for our new and potential members. Our membership team provided oversight to the implementation of our new website, and continues to manage our Gleaner Podcast initiative.

The Marketing and Public Relations team led by Co-Chairs Karlene Largie, UJAA's Corresponding Secretary and Jenniffer Brown, President of Westwood Old Girls Association soared UJAA to new heights and shone a bright light on UJAA's work. Our significantly increased social media presence, our interviews on radio and television, as well as our advertising in several media has contributed to the vastly improved name recognition of UJAA across the Diaspora and in Jamaica. Given this team's efforts, we can expect that UJAA will one day soon be known by all Jamaicans – no matter where they are!

2020 -2021 also saw the formation of UJAA's first Advisory Committee. Supported by Vice President Wilson, the team of Ralston Dunn of Creative Leasing and Funding, Janice Julian of Irie Jam Radio, and Gavin Ndabahaliye of Keys for Success have endeavored to provide guidance and support while giving organization and structure to this new team. We are grateful for their commitment to this important aspect of our development and look forward to their continued involvement in our growth.

UJAA continued to participate and support several initiatives in Jamaica's Diaspora through the Jamaica Diaspora Task Force Action Network (JDTAN) – led by Leo Gilling, the Jamaica Diaspora Education Task Force (JDETF) – led by Dr. Dwayne Dyce, and the Global Jamaica Diaspora Council Northeast – led by Dr. Karren Dunkley. UJAA participated in JDTAN's Inaugural Diaspora Awards Program, the JDETF's Education Summit, the JDETF's Education Leadership Summit, the Jamaica Teachers Association's Early Childhood Education Conference, Jamaica's Early Childhood Commission 2021 Conference, and various programs with the Catholic College of Mandeville to name a few. We also supported Ambassador's Audrey Marks' "Let's Connect" Program which began in April of 2021.

I would be remiss if I omitted UJAA's participation in the virtual reading of the play "Revenge of the Yellow Yams" authored by Wolmerian Author, Director and Playwright Hubert Guscott which afforded several UJAA members the opportunity to exercise their thespian chops. In addition to the big fun had by all who participated and who attended the reading, we are most appreciative of the donations to our Primary Schools team that resulted from the event. Once again, from our hearts – thank you!

As we close our year, we are deeply engaged in the planning of our **UJAA31 Celebration** which will be held in December and will recognize the achievements and contributions of 30 awardees. Among them are several UJAA members. We look forward with great anticipation to what we hope will be a memorable event.

In closing, my sincere thanks to the phenomenal members of UJAA's Board of Directors. Over this past year, we stretched and we achieved. We began to see a vision of not just what we've

done, but of what is possible. Special thanks to our Vice President Donovan Wilson who has been a true partner in leading UJAA this past year.

As I look forward to my final year as President, I thank you for the opportunity to serve you, our young people and our island home. I've endeavored, with the help of our leadership team, to maintain the high esteem with which UJAA is regarded, and to make you proud to be UJAA. I hope you share my pride in our accomplishments this year. We have opportunities and challenges yet to tackle. But I remain confident, that as a UNION, we will indeed "**be brave enough to not only see the light, but to be it,**" as we affirm our belief that: "**Education is empowerment; only the educated are free.**"

Respectfully submitted,

Lesleyann Samuel

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President

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