



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

EDUCATION IS EMPOWERMENT, ONLY THE EDUCATED ARE FREE

2021 – 2022 PRESIDENT’S REPORT

Annual General Meeting

13th September 2022

In 2022, Jamaica celebrated the 60th Anniversary of Independence. It was a time of tremendous celebration and of reflection. So too it was for UJAA. UJAA’s 2021 – 2022 operating year was a rewarding, exhilarating and – I think some will agree – exhausting year. It was also one of celebrations, of growth and achievements, as well as of challenges and opportunities.

We began our year filled with optimism as we prepared for our **UJAA31** Celebration. We recognized thirty-one (31) awardees for their contributions to our world in a wide variety of disciplines. With over four hundred (400) guests, our Sunday afternoon proved to be a beautiful celebration of our 31st anniversary. Allow me to thank the entire planning team who devoted many hours over many months to making the event a success.

As we emerged from the pandemic with some fits and starts, we continued most of our programs. We:

- Held our 13th Annual Service of Thanksgiving as a virtual event once again
- Hosted our 32nd Annual High School Graduate Awards also as a virtual event
- Held our 26th Mega Drawing outside at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church
- Continued our support of Industry Cove Basic School in Hanover and Operation Restoration Christian School in Trench Town, Kingston
- Held our monthly Board of Director’s Meetings, bi-monthly General Meetings, and quarterly Presidents’ Roundtables – all virtually except for our last Board of Director’s Meeting which was held on the lanai of the home of Melanie and Cedric George.

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

With the initiative of Director Natasha Davids, 2022 began with the phenomenal news that we’d been awarded a grant for \$100,000 towards operational expenses. This very timely grant allowed us to expand our programs and to make an even greater impact in the education space.

In late March, we were able to host almost 75 teachers, administrators and guidance counselors from Jamaica and St. Kitts with the support of the Jamaica Teachers Association as the host of the Jamaica Diaspora Education Task Force's Annual Education Summit 2022. We partnered with Marymount Manhattan College with the significant support of Dean Michael Salmon who is also a UJAA Director. With this initiative, UJAA fulfilled a commitment to bring our Jamaican teachers to the Big Apple. Our hope that teachers from our UJAA member organizations would attend the Summit did not materialize. We remain hopeful, however, that this will occur at future Summits.

With our grant, we were also able to expand our contribution to our Annual High School Graduate Awards program. We distributed over \$20,000 to our twenty-six (26) applicants with the help, also, of over twenty (20) member organizations as well as individuals and community organizations. Although our goal of awarding sixty awards (in recognition of Jamaica's 60th Independence) was not realized, we are grateful for the very high caliber of the participating students and look forward to hearing about their accomplishments in future.

Our Primary Schools Team continued their track record of commitment to their alma maters by collaborating on fundraising initiatives and by investing in Learnit Tablets for their schools. This spurred UJAA's proposal to support Jamaica's primary schools by investing in one hundred and eighty (180) Learnit Tablets – thus ensuring that every parish in Jamaica has at least two schools with Learnit tablets – with the goal of improving literacy and numeracy at eighteen (18) additional primary schools. My thanks to UJAA Director Evelyn Godden for leading this team as well as Dr. Gersham Nelson who assisted with defining the Learnit Tablet assessment process that will be used by the schools. It is our hope that the performance results of these schools will enable us to garner the support of other organizations so that this program can be expanded in future. Our Adopt-A-School Program pilot has launched with four (4) member associations – Immaculate Conception HS Alumnae Association, Knox Past Students Association, Wolmer's Alumni Association and York Castle HS Alumni Association – adopting four (4) primary schools. We look forward to hearing about the benefits of these proactive and positive relationships which, we hope, will encourage the adoption of additional schools by UJAA Member organizations and their schools.

In 2022, UJAA continued our support for Jamaica's **FIRST** Technology (Robotics) Challenge which was held in March with the participation of seventeen (17) high schools. Treasurer Clair Menzies-Forbes represented UJAA at the competition, which was held at Jamaica College in Kingston, and was on hand to congratulate York Castle High School who took the top award and who went on to compete at the National Competition in Houston, Texas. 2022 also saw the return of the **FIRST** Global Challenge as an in-person competition that will be held in Geneva, Switzerland in October. Team Jamaica, supported by UJAA, is poised to send a strong team to Europe. We look forward to hearing all about their experience later this year.

In April, thirteen (13) UJAA member schools participated in the Alliance of Jamaican Alumni Associations' Emerging Global Leaders Virtual program under the theme "Leading Through Adversity: Managing Your Mental Health." We are hopeful that this program will return to being an in-person program in the summer of 2023 and that our member organizations and schools will once again support this important leadership development program for our high school students.

We continue to work towards our plan to donate sixty (60) water tanks to basic and primary schools in Jamaica. We are close to reaching our goal and hope to begin delivery of tanks by the end of the year.

The coronavirus pandemic taught us about the importance of maintaining our mental health. Plans are underway, therefore, for the implementation of Happiness Clubs in several of our schools. Sincere thanks to Honorary Consul Christopher Chaplin for sharing this opportunity with us, and look forward to the formation of these clubs later this year.

In light of the opportunities provided by the virtual technology that the coronavirus pandemic inspired, UJAA hosted several additional events this year. They included "**Remembering Martin**" on Martin Luther King Day in January, "**Jamaica Day**" on February 25th, and produced **UJAA's Jamaica 60th Celebration** on August 10th with a reflective, educational and inclusive virtual program. My sincere thanks to our Education and Diaspora Co-Chairs Michael Salmon and Karlene Largie for suggesting and spear-heading these programs. I am hopeful that we will consider making some of these programs a part of UJAA's program line-up.

Our Membership Team, under the leadership of UJAA Director Dwight Clarke, continued their focus on you. Our bylaws were enhanced as a result of their work. In addition, they continued to direct the enhancements of our website, led by webmaster Desmond Duncker of St. George's College Old Boys Association NE, coordinated the Gleaner Podcast initiative and supported our participation in this year's Jerk Fest and Family FunDay. It is my hope that we will consider expanding our participation in the Family FunDay and develop this into an all-UJAA members event for family and friends. This year, we also celebrated our first **Alumni Day** with our fellow alumni umbrella organizations in Canada (AJAA) and Jamaica (JAAHS) on the 2nd Wednesday of October. Alumni Day represents an opportunity for us to reinforce the significance and contributions of alumni to those who are currently in our schools and who will one day be alumni. Let's seize this opportunity to make it a day for future alumni to look forward, with anticipation, to their opportunities to give forward as others have done for them.

The Education, Membership and Marketing committees collaborated on the development of UJAA's inaugural Leadership Development Academy. The goals of the academy were based on your feedback and focused on leadership development as we established/bolstered our

succession plans. As an expansion of the UJAA leadership development program of 2018, under the leadership of Vice President Donovan Wilson and UJAA Director Jenniffer Brown, seven (7) topical leadership-centric workshops were developed and delivered over 3 months. Your feedback suggested that this was a very worthwhile initiative. I look forward to the continued development of this program and the increased participation by you and your teams.

As a follow-on to our Care Packages programs of 2020 and 2021, we collaborated once again with the Lasco Chin Foundation to provide COVID Care Packages to the families of our schools with our Christmas and Summer Programs.

The Marketing and Public Relations team led by Co-Chairs Karlene Largie, UJAA's Corresponding Secretary, and Jenniffer Brown, UJAA Director and President of Westwood Old Girls Association continued to shine the 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. This team also collaborated with the Education and Diaspora Committee as well as the Membership Committee to promote individuals in our member organizations. This team was also responsible for our many well-placed ads in a cross-section of journals and periodicals. I am hopeful that those among us who have knowledge and skills in this area will consider joining this likely exhausted team who have made significant strides in making UJAA an almost-household name.

After a valiant start in 2020-2021, during 2021 -2022, our first Advisory Committee struggled to find their footing. Nevertheless, we are grateful for the support of Ralston Dunn, Janice Julian and Gavin Ndabaliye. We will build on the lessons learned from this first foray with this approach, and go forward.

UJAA continued to participate and support several initiatives in Jamaica's Diaspora through the Jamaica Diaspora Education Task Force (JDETF), the Global Jamaica Diaspora Council Northeast – led by Dr. Karren Dunkley, and Education Solutions International – led by Dr. and Mrs. Dwayne Dyce. UJAA Board members participated in several conferences including the Jamaica Teacher's Association's Future Leaders Conference and the Council of Community Colleges of Jamaica to name a few. UJAA participated in the 2022 Jamaica Diaspora Conference and attended the Jamaica Teachers' Association Annual Conference. We also continued our support of Ambassador's Audrey Marks' "Let's Connect" Program which began in April of 2021.

As our operational year closes, we have several projects under development. They include a collaboration between the Jamaica Stock Exchange, First Generation Investors (of the University of Pennsylvania) and UJAA to establish investment clubs in our high schools, as well as a stock market investment enrichment program for you – our members, and the Past Students Book Project which will document YOUR contributions to education in Jamaica. I suspect that, before

long, there may be others. Our continued growth will open many new doors and create new challenges. I hope that the prospect of these possibilities are exciting for you.

In closing, my sincere thanks to the phenomenal, hard-working, committed and dedicated members of UJAA's Board of Directors – Donovan Wilson, Melanie Forrest-George, Karlene Largie, Clair Menzies-Forbes, Wilbert Davis, Jenniffer Brown, Dwight Clarke, Natasha Davids, Evelyn Godden and Michael Salmon. Over this past year, we continued to stretch and we accomplished much more than even we expected. It was an unusual year in some respects – particularly with addition of our many Jamaica 60th events. But we stepped up. I hope that you are as proud of our accomplishments as I am.

When I began this journey as your president in 2014, I knew then that this would be an experience that I would cherish and enjoy. I also knew that I would work hard (it's who I am), that I would learn a lot, and that when it was all said and done, I would have given my best and would leave UJAA in a better place than when I started. Sincere thanks to each and every one of you for your feedback, honesty and support. Most importantly, thank you for the opportunity to serve you, our students and teachers, 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 that you share my pride in our accomplishments this year, as well as our growth and achievements over the past eight years. We have opportunities and challenges yet to tackle. So, I ask you all to raise your eyes to the heavens and to proceed as if success is inevitable. Stay ready and be bold. I am confident that we will continue the trajectory that we're on and surpass our collective hopes and dreams. As a UNION – joined together as fingers to a fist – there is much that we can continue to do as we affirm our belief that: **“Education is empowerment; only the educated are free.”**

Respectfully submitted,

Lesleyann Samuel

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President

13th September 2022

Presented at UJAA's Annual General Meeting via Zoom on Tuesday 13 September 2022.