



**UNION of JAMAICAN ALUMNI ASSOCIATIONS U.S.A., Inc.**

229-19 Merrick Boulevard, #141, Springfield Gardens, NY 11413 - 347.927.3606  
www.ujaausa.org

*Over Thirty-three years of ~ Dedication ~ Commitment ~ Service*

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

## **2022 – 2023 PRESIDENT’S REPORT**

**Annual General Meeting**

**19<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

The Annual General Meeting in September 2022 signaled a new era as we experienced what could be seen as a monumental shift. We had a new president for the first time in eight years. We were about to enter uncharted waters as many of our organizations had never known another president. After all, Lesleyann Samuel had led the growth and expansion of the Union with great success during those eight years. So here we are one year later, and our 2022-2023 operating year is ending. This was a difficult year of transition but thanks to every one of you it has also been hugely successful and rewarding. We stand proudly, acknowledging the trials and triumphs of a challenging transition year. Our continued success is a testament to every one of you and your unwavering commitment to the Union.

We began our year with a Board retreat, an ambitious agenda of things to be done, and plans for our Mega Drawing 2023. Our vision was to expand the number of participants so that more organizations could benefit from the success of Mega, as many of us call it. We were able to do that, increasing the number of participants from 34 to 38 and with a gross for the participants of over \$329,000 for the first time in our history. Allow me to thank the Board of Directors for their hard work and commitment over these 12 months. I know that the meetings were many, and at times working for UJAA felt like a full-time job and I am grateful to you all for your untiring work for the Union.

Amidst a changing landscape as life gradually returned to normalcy, we remained steadfast in our commitment to UJAA and its programs. Our companies yearned for us to return to work five days a week and many of us looked at doing so with dread. Our priorities had changed and working in an office five days a week was a scary proposition now.

We celebrated milestones and continued vital initiatives - It was business as usual for us:

- The 14th Annual Service of Thanksgiving took place in person for the first time since 2019.
- The 33rd Annual High School Graduate Awards were hosted virtually.
- The 27th Mega Drawing was held outdoors at St. Peter's Episcopal Church once more.

- Support for Industry Cove Basic School in Hanover and Operation Restoration Christian School in Trench Town, Kingston, continued.
- Regular meetings, including the Board of Directors and Presidents' Roundtables, were conducted mostly virtually.
- We held our various committee meetings regularly by Zoom and at least one Zoom event was held as a fundraiser. This event is noteworthy as we raised over \$5,000 in less than two hours as part of our drive to get Team Jamaica Robotics to Singapore this coming October. Some of the details of these accomplishments are included in the various Annual Reports of our Committees, which were distributed previously.

As a follow-on to our Care Packages programs of 2020 - 2022, we collaborated once again with the Lasco Chin Foundation to provide COVID Care Packages to the families of our schools through our Christmas Program. A total of 326 packages were provided, reflecting a 15% drop from the height of the pandemic.

At this time, I pause to recognize one of our own. Ms. Natasha Davids has served on the Board with distinction and honor for 12 years. Though leaving the Board, she will remain deeply involved in initiatives close to her heart, reflecting the true spirit of our community.. She has given of her time, use of her home for meetings and financial assistance for so many projects both personally and through her company, that time would not allow me to list all her contributions here. She will be missed but we are fortunate to still have her near at hand.

In mid-June, we were able to continue our involvement in the Jamaica Diaspora Taskforce Action Network, (JDTAN), Education Conference and over 100 teachers and administrators were hosted in Miramar Florida on the campus of Florida Atlantic University (FAU). Several of our organizations responded to my appeal for financial support and UJAA provided shirts for all the attendees to this conference. Teachers from St. Kitts once again attended the conference and the Jamaica Teachers Association was thrilled to have UJAA as a partner with them once again for this venture. We were a part of the initial conference over eight years ago and our support remains strong for this venture as it benefits our teachers. Vice President Michael Salmon was a presenter at the conference this year, and the UJAA banner was prominently displayed over the three days of meetings at Florida Atlantic University (FAU). It is our hope that more teachers from our member organization schools will attend the next conference, slated for June 2024.

Our Annual High School Graduate Awards program entered its 33<sup>rd</sup> year and we distributed over \$11,000 to our nineteen (19) applicants with the help of more than fifteen (15) member organizations as well as individuals and community organizations. Coming off the high of 2022, when we had money from our Patti Birch grant, this is still a noteworthy achievement as we did very well with what we had in hand. We certainly look forward to hearing more about these students as they move on with their collegiate life.

Our Primary Schools Team has broken new ground this year - to use a phrase from Chair Evelyn Godden, the Primary Schools Team has been “lit” and remain on fire with their work. We delivered on our commitment of one hundred and eighty (180) Learnit Tablets – thus ensuring that every parish in Jamaica has at least two schools with Learnit tablets – and we provided training over several months so that our goal of improving literacy and numeracy could be tracked via data gathering. Thank you UJAA Director Evelyn Godden for leading this team as well as Immediate Past President Lesleyann Samuel, and Mr. Joel Webbe from Caribbean eBooks Limited, for the work that was done to make the training a success. Thanks to Hubert Guscott and Ms. Beverley Barr from Wolmers for agreeing to provide ongoing support once the formal training ended.

Our Adopt-A-School Program pilot was launched over a year ago with four (4) member associations – Immaculate Conception HS Alumnae Association, Knox Association of Past Students NY, Wolmer’s Alumni Association and York Castle HS Alumni Association – adopting four (4) primary schools. Today we are encouraging more schools to speak with us about joining the program. The pilot has been extended and our focus on this project remains strong as we enter the 2023 -2024 year.

In 2023, UJAA continued our support for Robotics in Jamaica. The **FIRST** Technology (Robotics) Challenge was held in February with the participation of more than 15 high schools. UJAA Director Dwight Clarke and UJAA Corresponding Secretary Karlene Large represented UJAA at the competition, which was held at Jamaica College in Kingston. Jamaica College and Immaculate Conception took the top awards and two students went on to compete at the World Championships in Houston, Texas. This year, 2023, will be the second post COVID, in person, version of the **FIRST** Global Challenge and will be held in Singapore from October 7 – 10. Team Jamaica Robotics will consist of six students, two coaches and two UJAA Chaperones – Mr. Ansell Williams and Ms. Karlene Largie. We were faced with projected expenses of almost \$100,000 and we buckled down to try to raise the money. We also had a plan in case we fell short. So it is with great pride that I announce that The FIRST Global organization agreed to pay the airfares for five students and two coaches. We will cover other expenses for the team totaling just over \$30,000. So far we have raised over \$8,000 and our chaperones will do their part by contributing towards their expenses. Team Jamaica, supported by UJAA, will have a strong team in Singapore. We will share their journey with you as the trip unfolds.

In April, we collaborated with honorary Consul General Christopher Chaplin on the launch of Happiness Clubs in Jamaica. Several of our schools took part and our support was greatly appreciated. As Jamaica faces major challenges with violence – including violence in schools - it is our hope that this program will help to foster an environment of communication and de-escalation for our students, addressing the need for improved mental health support in schools. Sincere thanks to Honorary Consul Christopher Chaplin for sharing this opportunity with us and we look forward to the formation of more of these clubs later this year.

Despite challenges, we remained resolute in our efforts to provide water tanks to schools. While we fell short of our initial goal, we are pleased to announce progress in providing 20 tanks this year, with more to come. We remain committed to providing more water tanks as funding permits but continue to be vigilant about how we spend your money. Unfortunately, we did not donate any water tanks in the 2021 - 2022 UJAA year as planned, even though we wanted to donate 60 tanks. We have now paid for the 20 tanks for 2023, with delivery to the schools expected over the next few weeks.

You have heard UJAA Director Dwight Clarke's passionate appeals to you to tell us what you want from us. The Membership committee, which he leads, continues to look for ways to provide more value to you. The Gleaner podcast series remains available to you to showcase what you are doing in your organization. The team provided tickets for the Annual Groovin event and UJAA had its first Fun Day at the Tri-State Family Fun Day, hosted by Conroy Allison on August 13th. We are looking to expand our participation in the Family Fun Day next year and develop this into an all-UJAA members event for family and friends.

This year, we also celebrated our second Alumni Day with our fellow alumni umbrella organization in Jamaica, Jamaica Alumni Association of High Schools, JAAHS, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of October, 2022. 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 become alumni. We must continue to make this day a special one as we share what alumni are doing and can do to make current students have a better life at school day after day.

The second iteration of Leadership Development Academy took place this year. Once again the goals of the academy were based on your feedback. As an expansion of the UJAA leadership development program of 2018, with the first Leadership Academy being held in 2022, UJAA Director Jenniffer Brown, and her co-chair Lesleyann Samuel developed five leadership seminars, delivered over 3 months and a Leadership Summit that was held on August 19th. The success of this program cannot be discounted, and I look forward to increased participation by you and your colleagues.

This year we moved our website to the Marketing and Public Relations (MPR) team. Our website is regularly updated and webmaster Desmond Duncker of St. George's College Old Boys Association NE, is focused on training others to take on key functions of the site. In line with this goal, Ms. Lesleyann Samuel will begin to undertake the lead for the website and will put together a team to work on its development. Desmond will continue to assist us. We owe a debt of gratitude to Desmond for his services, and we would never be able to pay him for all that he has done. He is indeed a true stalwart of UJAA.

The Marketing and Public Relations team led by Chair Jenniffer Brown, UJAA Director and President of Westwood Old Girls Association and Vice Chair Karlene Largie, UJAA's Corresponding Secretary, continued to deliver exceptional work. Our significantly increased social media presence, and other activities, has contributed to further name recognition for UJAA across the Diaspora and in Jamaica. The team has increased our visibility in a way that had not been there previously. The work has been exhausting and I hope that others will join this team as it continues to build the UJAA brand.

Our first Advisory Committee started in 2020-2021. Their term ended in September 2023 and we have not had a new Advisory Committee in place since. We are grateful for the support of Ralston Dunn, Janice Julian and Gavin Ndabahaliye and we have built on the lessons learnt from them. A new Advisory Committee will be in place to begin work immediately after our elections on Thursday.

In closing, I extend my gratitude to the UJAA Board and all association members for their unwavering dedication and hard work during this past year. Thank you, Michael Salmon, Melanie Forrest-George, Karlene Largie, Clair Menzies-Forbes, Ansell Williams, Jenniffer Brown, Dwight Clarke, Natasha Davids, Evelyn Godden, Wilbert Davis, and Immediate Past President Lesleyann Samuel for your work with me over this past year. Together, we have accomplished much, navigating changes and challenges with resilience and determination. I am proud of our achievements, and I hope I have served you well this year.

As I began this journey as your president, I knew it would be a test of my mettle. I knew that I would work hard and would be challenged and face roadblocks. I knew that I would learn a lot and that I had great people around me. I stand here today, having given my best, and having learned that perseverance and hard work always pay off. Your feedback and support have guided me, and I trust that I have upheld the esteemed reputation of UJAA and made you proud to be UJAA.

The words of our motto echo as strongly today as they did 33 years ago: "**Education is empowerment; only the educated are free.**" Let us continue this journey of empowerment and freedom through education.

*Donovan Wilson*

President

19<sup>th</sup> September 2023

***Presented at UJAA's Annual General Meeting via Zoom on Tuesday 19 September 2023.***