

President's Speech, 2020 Graduation Exercises

Congratulations to the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College Class of 2020.

Today you join a fellowship of travelers, many of whom have gone before you in a line winding back the last three decades into the last millennium. A party of wanderers and explorers, a body of alumni I am proud to count myself among, who have been working hard in our own ways to improve the quality of life of humanity in general and the people of this Territory in particular. Stand up and be counted.

Graduations celebrate an important milestone. They are that moment when we say that these persons, capped and gowned in their celebratory regalia, emerge better equipped than they entered to make a measurable contribution to civil society. That has never been more true than today. The world faces numerous inscrutable challenges – wars, climate change, bigotry, systemic inequity, and many more troubles still to come. Simply put, the Territory, the World needs YOU. It needs you more than ever before.

Our Founding Chairman loved a particular piece of scripture, and he was incredibly fond of quoting it. I am sure you have heard it time and time again, but it does not lose its value by me repeating the wisdom of Proverbs chapter 29

verse 18: Where there is no vision, the people perish. Today, our vision is 2020. Look around you. So much has happened this year outside of our foresight.

By the end of January, enough happened to fill a year's worth of crises: the novel coronavirus had already begun its silent and invisible march towards instigating a global pandemic; the United Kingdom left the European Union; the United States and Iran flirted with open war; bushfires raged in Australia; South Africa struggled with a drought that severely threatened food security in the region; dozens of countries experienced civil unrest; and the American President was impeached.

Almost none of this was expected, but as technology and open markets continue to shrink the world, we have learned only too well that what happens in a market in Wuhan matters in Lagos, matters in London, matters in New York, matters in Hong Kong, matters in the British Virgin Islands.

Covid-19 has taught us that what we cannot see can kill us. So, vision requires imagination, but also bravery. Once you have envisioned the future you wish to live, lean on that quiet strength in your spirit that sustains, rely on your faith to guide you through the challenges that will surely come your way, and remember that the same dust spinning out there among the stars is in you. Nothing before

you is outside of your orbit - once you can visualize it you can realize it. What is for you can never be not so.

You have demonstrated the true meaning of sacrifice and resilience. The obstacles have been many, but you stand proud today knowing you have overcome them all. But you did not arrive here alone. To all the parents, friends, family, and community members who supported our graduates throughout their time with us and especially through the pandemic. Accept our collective thanks for bearing our students up when times were at their toughest.

Times were tough for the College as well, but I am happy to say that this proud institution is turning a corner out of recovery into discovery. This year we invested in our Workforce division and our investments are paying dividends already. Our renovated Culinary Institute has graduated three proud chefs, our Marine Centre transplanted the first 54 mangrove seedlings from its Mangrove Nursery, and the first cohort from our Marine Professional Training programme went out into the world of work. We have taken an aggressive approach towards institutional advancement, and thanks to our work there and collaborations with various units we are creating opportunities for our students and the community. We are also grateful for all the support we have received from our corporate partners and funding organizations. I have to give special thanks for the support of Unite BVI, Nagico, Smiths Gore, XXXX. I'm happy to announce today that

our research database partner EBSCO has granted the College a \$50,000 grant to install a solar array on the roof of our Learning Resource Centre. We are thankful for all the support we continue to receive in realizing our mission.

Class of 2020, this is about you. You have earned the right to celebrate your accomplishment. You have done it in a way that has never been done before – all you've done this year is make history. But do not prolong your celebrations, for there is work to do, and this end is really a beginning.

Tomorrow this chapter will be closed, and you will embark on your next journey, a journey of your own making and design. I challenge you to continue to work hard, to continue to be resourceful and adaptive, to be willing to be uncomfortable and to ask the difficult questions of yourself and others. I challenge you, not to just make something of yourselves, but to make something new and glorious of this world.

I wish each and every one of you well in all your worthy endeavours and Godspeed.