

# Okanagan-Jamaica partnership expands

By STEVE MACNAULL

The Daily Courier

At first, everyone at the Okanagan College-Jamaica partnership news conference wanted to talk about Usain Bolt. "This partnership has come so far, so fast, but not as fast as Usain Bolt," Okanagan College president Jim Hamilton said with a laugh.

Bolt, of course, is Jamaica's new national hero and an international superstar for his stunning performances at the Beijing Olympics. Bolt became the fastest man in the world by setting records and bringing home gold medals in the 100 metre, 200 metre and 4x100-metre relay track events.

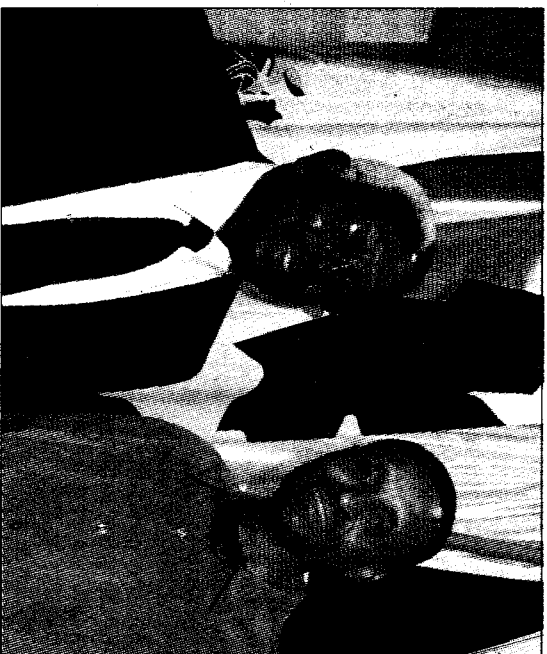
While introducing Jamaican Minister of Labour Pearnel Charles, Okanagan College vice-president Steve Koehle jokingly added "coach of the Jamaican track team" to his list of accomplishments after author, advocate, trade union leader and politician.

And Okanagan College student Dudley Reid, from Jamaica, showed his patriotism.

"How about that Jamaican track team?" he asked.

"Those guys make us proud." With the Bolitisms out of the way, the official announcements were made.

The Jamaican government is providing \$200,000 in student loans for Jamaicans who want to attend Okanagan College.



STEVE MACNAULL/The Daily Courier

**Jamaican Minister of Labour Pearnel Charles, left, and student Dudley Reid, were at an Okanagan College news conference announcing an expanded partnership between the college and Jamaica.**

Okanagan College will expand its pilot project from 34 Jamaican students currently to 100 more next month. It will also provide the curriculum for 500 practical nursing students at Jamaican schools.

"There are enormous benefits for both Jamaica and the Okanagan," said Charles.

"Our economy will benefit with returning students who have been educated at Okanagan College and the Okanagan economy with its labour shortage can benefit with Jamaican workers."

Reid is one of 15 auto body repair



Photo contributed

**Jamaican sprinter and Olympic superstar Usain Bolt received lots of mentions at the Okanagan College-Jamaica news conference.**

apprentices at the college.

"I'm going to school, but I also have a work practicum at Fenders Autobody & Paint," he said.

"When I get my journeyman certification, I would like to live and work in Kelowna and bring my wife and child here, too."

In conjunction with the college partnership, the Central Okanagan Economic Development

Commission has helped bring in Jamaican workers for local employers experiencing the labour pinch. Jamaicans worked on the Bennett Bridge and are working for Sun

Valley Window Cleaners, Manteo Resort and Greyback Construction on condominium projects at Silver Star Resort near Vernon and in Osoyoos.

The initiatives started about 18 months ago when Jamaican-born Okanagan College hospitality professor Michael Patterson thought there should be some sort of Okanagan-Jamaica connection.

The local college and economic development commission, along with the Jamaican government, agreed and the partnership formed and expanded quickly.

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