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Charlotte Amalie High School Graduates Celebrate Success and Perseverance

"Be Bold, Be Yourself" Governor Bryan Encourages 187 Chicken Hawks

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On Thursday, the Charlotte Amalie High School held its 93rd graduation ceremony, with 187 Chicken Hawks plus a myriad of family, friends and well-wishers crowding into the school auditorium for their final gathering as a class.

Principal Angel Petrus said that it had been an “excellent year, with great accomplishments and moments to be proud of and to celebrate.”

Instead of focusing on the challenges faced by this year’s graduating class – including the disruption caused by the pandemic – Ms. Petrus said she decided to highlight the achievements

she felt most proud of: the school's JROTC battalion dominating the inter-island drill competition, their team's victory at this year's territorial moot court competition, and the several championship titles in basketball, volleyball, and soccer. The 2024 graduating class were also strong academic achievers, Ms. Petrus noted, with 113 students graduating with honors, and 42 receiving high honors. She revealed that 51 graduating seniors are members of their local National Honor Society chapter, while 6 were AP scholars. Three students even secured early admission to the University of the Virgin Islands, the proud administrator noted. And 71 students, even prior to receiving their high school diplomas, had already obtained certification in a range of technical and vocational subject areas.

District Superintendent for the Department of Education Dr. Stefan Jurgen, before presenting awards to the class valedictorian and salutatorian, had these brief words highlighting the power of self-determination for this year's crop of seniors: "If you believe you can, or cannot – you're absolutely correct... It's the power of your mind."

Education Commissioner Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington reminded the graduates that they each possess unique gifts, and urged them to look within to figure out what those gifts are and how to use them to achieve their goals in life. "One of the things I think that we struggle with today is trying to fit into some kind of mold of what a successful person looks like, or what an accomplished person looks like," Dr. Wells-Hedrington stated. "All of us were born to be unique, that's why we all look different. We're not meant to fit into anybody's mold."

Salutatorian Karra Henderson reflected on her journey from a small private middle school to a large public high school, noting that several in her community were skeptical about her ability to excel among hundreds of students. Her designation as class salutatorian as recognition of her successful high school tenure "is not just a testament to my hard work and dedication, but also the incredible support system that has surrounded me," Ms. Henderson declared, calling high school "a transformative experience."

Meanwhile, valedictorian Maleah Davis acknowledged the difficult path that this year's graduates had to walk to reach the triumphant moment they were all gathered to celebrate. "The two years of isolation brought with us an uneasiness and loneliness that time has yet to fix," Ms. Davis remarked. Nevertheless, she radiated pride as she surveyed her fellow graduates seated before her, noting that there were "future entrepreneurs, honest lawyers and politicians, loving nurses and doctors, military personnel, plumbers, electricians, and estheticians" among them. "This happily ever after is one of many," she reminded the class, noting that they have a long future ahead.

As part of his keynote address, featured speaker Ivo Philbert made reference, like those before him, to the perseverance and resilience of the graduating class. Mr. Philbert, an alumnus of CAHS from the class of 1984, urged the 2024 graduates to root themselves in their identity as Chicken Hawks as they move forward in life. "You got this, because you are Chicken Hawks," he said, praising the school's culture of excellence and determination. "You will be resilient for you are Chicken Hawks," Mr. Philbert declared. He urged them not to let their island background make them feel limited in their life options, highlighting Aliyah Boston and Theron Thomas as examples of Virgin Islanders who are now household names across the nation.

As he ended his remarks, Mr. Philbert exhorted the young Chicken Hawks to move through the next phase of their lives with mindfulness, carefully monitoring thoughts, words, and actions. "What you think is what you speak, what you speak is what you do, what you do is who you are, and who you are determines where you go."

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. praised the school's "culture of excellence", and emphasized how much success depends on having a "strong village". To the students, he conveyed his admiration, and noted that despite complaints about the education system, "consistently, we're producing graduates that not only compete locally, but compete nationally, and guess what – winning!" Noting that he remained loyal to the Chicken Hawks despite his sophomore-year transfer to St. Croix, Governor Bryan left the CAHS graduating class with the following encouragement and admonition: "You have many mountains to climb and many, many, many graduation stages to walk across. Be bold, be yourself."

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