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## Young Virgin Islanders Honored for Winning International Essay Awards

**Lockhart K-8 receives \$10,000 from FCCA as students are recognized for their ability to articulate the unique beauty of the Virgin Islands in their essays**

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Four young Virgin Islanders were celebrated on Tuesday for their outstanding achievements in the international essay competition organized by the Florida Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA). The ceremony, held at Lockhart K-8 School, brought together Governor Albert Bryan Jr., tourism and education officials, cruise industry executives, parents, teachers, and community supporters to honor the students' accomplishments.

The honorees included Rachell Guzman Ramirez, who secured First Place in the Senior Division, and Tyler Ian Antonio Chung, who earned Second Place in the Junior Division. Also recognized

were Senior Division participant Nafiah Yarborough and Junior Division participant J'Quan Walwyn. Their essays were judged as among the best across the Caribbean, Central America, 30 states, and Mexico.

Governor Bryan commended the students for their impressive achievements and highlighted their role as representatives of the territory on an international stage. "Our winners represented us to the world," the governor said. "You are a big deal, and it's important that we show up for you all the time."

Lockhart K-8 Principal Merlene Jones also praised the students, calling them "ambassadors for the place you call home." She thanked the V.I. Department of Tourism for creating opportunities for young writers to showcase their talents.

FCCA Chief Executive Officer Michele M. Paige shared her pride in the students' success and announced a \$10,000 donation to Lockhart K-8 School. Paige also revealed plans to fund a celebratory party for the school in honor of the winners' achievements.

The First Place winners, Rachell and Tyler, were awarded laptops along with \$750 checks from the Office of the Governor. The other winners, Nafiah Yarborough and J'Quan Walwyn, received \$250 each as part of the recognition. These prizes underscore the commitment of the territory to support and celebrate the achievements of its young scholars.

Remarks from officials, including Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte, Deputy Tourism Commissioner RoseAnne Farrington, Education Commissioner Dionne Wells-Hedrington, and Insular Superintendent Stefan Jurgen, highlighted the pride felt throughout the community. Each expressed admiration for the students' ability to articulate what makes the Virgin Islands special through their essays.

"You can come from someplace small and you can do big things," said an elated Jurgen, emphasizing the significance of the students' accomplishments.