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Virgin Islands Students Complete Elite NASA-Style Training at U.S. Space & Rocket Center

Seven USVI students completed elite training at Space Camp 2025 in Alabama, thanks to full scholarships from CFVI and RapierMed, participating in advanced simulations, aviation drills, and leadership exercises that inspired future STEM ambitions.

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From left to right, Naitik Jhanwar and Harish Jhanwar.

Seven high school students from the U.S. Virgin Islands have returned from an intensive week at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama, where they participated in immersive training through Space Camp and Aviation Challenge 2025.

The experience was made possible through full scholarships provided by the Kym's Kids Caribbean Agency Fund at the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands (CFVI), in partnership with RapierMed. Covering all expenses — including airfare, lodging, meals, tuition, and custom Space Camp flight suits — the scholarships opened the door to a nationally renowned program focused on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning.

Six of the students took part in the Advanced Space Academy, a program designed for youth aged 15 to 18. Their training included authentic space simulations, scuba-based neutral buoyancy exercises, and a 24-hour simulated space mission that required real-time collaboration between roles in mission control and aboard a mock spacecraft.

One participant, Anais Craig of Giffit Hill School in St. John, completed Aviation Challenge Mach III, the highest level of flight training available to high school students. Her program mirrored the training of elite fighter pilots, including water survival, land navigation, and simulated combat exercises in high-performance flight simulators. Craig was honored with the “Right Stuff Award,” a highly selective recognition granted to one trainee per week for exhibiting leadership, teamwork, and perseverance — traits emblematic of early astronauts and test pilots. “Space Camp was more than just learning about space,” she said. “It was about leadership, teamwork, and pushing our limits.”



Fellow participant Naitik Jhanwar also reflected on the program's impact. “From astronaut simulations to rock climbing challenges, every experience helped us grow, build trust, and connect with people from all over.”

The students represented all three main islands of the territory. Participants included:

- Naitik Jhanwar (All Saints Cathedral School, St. Thomas)
- Tiera J'Nai Polanco (St. Croix Educational Complex High School)
- Sumyah Mark (Charlotte Amalie High School, St. Thomas)
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Colum Morgan (St. Croix Educational Complex High School)

- Seamus Henry O'Donnell (Giffit Hill School, St. John)
- Kali Calhoun (Ivanna Eudora Kean High School, St. Thomas)
- Anais Craig (Giffit Hill School, St. John)

RapierMed Business Support Manager Allena Clifford praised the value of STEM immersion for young minds. “Our goal is to give students access to life-changing STEM experiences that challenge and empower them. This kind of opportunity lights a spark that can last a lifetime — and we’re honored to help make it possible.”

Dee Baecher-Brown, president of CFVI, echoed that sentiment. “At CFVI, we believe in the power of opportunity to transform lives,” she said. “We’re proud to support these remarkable students as they explore their potential and expand their horizons through experiences like Space Camp.”

Parents of participants were also moved by the program’s impact. “This opportunity gave Naitik new wings to pursue his passion for space exploration,” said his father, Harish Jhanwar. “We’re deeply grateful to RapierMed. Without their support, this incredible journey wouldn’t have been possible.”

Since its founding in 1982, more than 700,000 students from around the world have attended Space Camp programs, which are widely known for building leadership, critical thinking, and teamwork skills through hands-on STEM learning.

“Space Camp is a great experience,” said Jhanwar. “Given the chance, I would love to go again and continue living like an astronaut!”

For more information about RapierMed and its community partnerships, visit rapiermed.com or call 340-693-2535.