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## **St. Croix Student Adaina Smith Named First Recipient of Rashida Hodge Scholarship to Attend NC State**

**Adaina Smith of St. Croix will receive full tuition, fees, housing and mentorship for up to four years at NC State through a \$1 million endowment created by Microsoft executive and Virgin Islander Rashida Hodge in partnership with CFVI this academic year.**

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**Rashida Hodge and Adaina Smith. By. CFVI.**

ST. THOMAS — Adaina Smith of St. Croix has been selected as the first recipient of the Rashida A. Hodge Scholarship, an award that will cover full tuition, fees, housing and mentorship for up to four years at North Carolina State University.

Smith was selected by the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands scholarship committee. She will begin her college experience this summer through NC State's Summer Start Program before joining the university in the fall.

The scholarship was established through a \$1 million endowment created by NC State alumna and Microsoft executive Rashida Hodge in partnership with CFVI, where she also serves as a board member. Described as the largest scholarship award in CFVI's history, it was created to expand access to higher education for students from the U.S. Virgin Islands public school system by removing financial barriers and creating a pathway to NC State.

For Hodge, the scholarship is tied to her own experience leaving the Virgin Islands for college. A St. Thomas native and graduate of Charlotte Amalie High School, NC State and Duke University, Hodge attended college with scholarship support that allowed her to graduate debt-free and begin her career without student loan debt.

"Scholarships changed the trajectory of my life," said Hodge. "I came to NC State because others invested in me, and I graduated debt-free because people I had never met believed in my future. Growing up, my parents taught me that if you believe in something, you have to be willing to make a sacrifice. This scholarship is my way of paying that gift forward and creating the same opportunity for the next generation of Virgin Islands students."

Hodge now serves as corporate vice president of cloud and AI platforms at Microsoft. She established the scholarship in honor of her grandmother, Ioline Hodge, whose legacy of generosity, faith and service continues to influence her commitment to expanding educational opportunity.

"Rashida elevates NC State in all that she does through her leadership, service, and philanthropic commitment," said Brian Sischo, vice chancellor for university advancement at NC State. "This partnership creates life-changing opportunities for talented students from the Virgin Islands while strengthening the connection between NC State and a community that has produced remarkable leaders like Rashida. We are thrilled to welcome Adaina to the Wolfpack family."

Students from the U.S. Virgin Islands often face financial and geographic barriers when pursuing higher education on the mainland. The Rashida A. Hodge Scholarship was created to help reduce those barriers while strengthening the connection between the Virgin Islands and NC State.

"Rashida's story is extraordinary because she has reached the highest levels of global leadership while remaining deeply connected to the community that shaped her," said Dee Baecher-Brown, president of CFVI. "This scholarship creates opportunities that will impact students and families for generations while strengthening the connection between the Virgin Islands and NC State."

Smith plans to pursue a business administration degree on the pre-law track, with hopes of becoming an attorney.

"I am deeply grateful for the Rashida Hodge Scholarship and mentorship opportunity," said Smith. "It gives me the chance to attend NC State and fully dedicate myself to my education without placing financial strain on my family. This opportunity motivates me to grow into a leader who not only succeeds, but also gives back and opens doors for others."

The launch of the scholarship has also prompted Hodge to encourage other leaders to consider establishing scholarships and educational pathways for next year's graduates in their own communities, regardless of the size of the award. Her message is that philanthropy does not

require extraordinary wealth, but intentional planning, sacrifice and a commitment to creating opportunities for others.

"My hope is that years from now there will be dozens of Virgin Islands students walking across NC State's campus because one student became two, two became ten, and ten became a tradition," said Hodge. "This scholarship isn't just about helping a student attend college. It's about creating a pathway that can change families for generations."

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