

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Elena Christian Rocketry Club Students Honored At Church Ceremony

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ST. CROIX -- They've been lauded by residents territory-wide for their exceptional accomplishments. Governor Kenneth Mapp and other government officials have expressed their gratitude and salute for their work in putting the islands on the map in a positive light, and yesterday, at an award ceremony held at The Church of the Nazarene in Williams Delight, students of the Elena Christian Junior High School (ECJH) Rocketry Club were honored with certificates and awards.

The ceremony represented a culmination of the team's hard work, and a new beginning that will see its leader, Steve Bullock, who was the master of ceremony at the Sunday event, leading freshmen and veteran team members to new grounds of achievement.

Keynoting the special affair was Police Commissioner Delroy Richards, Sr., who told The Consortium that he sought to first laud the students for their outstanding achievements, calling them "true ambassadors of the territory," and second to beseech them to continue on the trajectory of greatness.

"I think the students have earned the distinction (of ambassadors) by the representation they have provided for this territory abroad," Mr. Richards said. The police commissioner added that he told the Rocketry Club members about his own experience and what he believed to be the factors perpetuating crime in the islands.

And in relation to producing additional talent similar to the Club's members, Mr. Richards joked that cloning Mr. Bullock was the only possible way to do so.

On a more serious note, however, he said, "you have to try to get folks to understand the importance of education. It cannot be lip service, you have to have a passion for whatever you do with these youngsters. If you don't have that passion, that inner feeling of what you want to do, you're wasting your time."

Mr. Bullock, an educator for 32 years with 19 spent in public education, gave answers to The Consortium that fell in line with Mr. Richards' sentiments, and said he would continue added passion and, more pointedly, a calling.



Police Commissioner Delroy Richards, Sr.,

delivering his keynote speech.

"It's more than a passion," Bullock began. "It's a spiritual philosophy that I have adhered to from the time I was born-again as a Christian. And that is, if you plant seeds, you will get a harvest; and my philosophy is that if you plant good seeds you're going to get a good harvest."

Mr. Bullock said this includes investing in the territory's youth, "and before you know it, they're going to grow up, but that investment is going to pay dividends big time down the road because by doing so we save ourselves from burglaries, from having the prisons overwhelmed, and more than that, we'll have contributing members in the community who will be paying taxes and become productive citizens. So that's what I gravitate towards; that's like the lightning rod that sparks that passion in me to work with this generation to make them the next success story."

The Rocketry Club has been in existence for 15 years, Mr. Bullock said. The program is being displaced from its home at Elena because of ongoing repairs at the school, and will

be moved to Charles H. Emanuel Elementary School, where Bullock says he will do his best to seamlessly transit to the new, albeit temporary location.

The Consortium spoke to three Rocketry Club members yesterday to glean information about their future plans and how the program has affected their lives.

"I feel greatly appreciated," said Kervin Mathurin, "this has been a very good program over the years and I'm glad to be a part of it going into my third year," he added, thanking Mr. Bullock and other group leaders for accepting him into the program. Mathurin said the Club has taught him leadership and improved his confidence.

Stephanie Bullock, longtime Rocketry Club member and daughter of Advisor, Mr. Bullock, pinpointed teamwork as the biggest lesson she's learned from the program. She also learned many life skills indelible to leading a successful life, and the program has also enhanced her public relations abilities.

Gabriel St. Kitts, who decided from the onset of his junior high school journey to be "free," and not having to "worry about anything," -- a decision that saw the young man failing in school -- said joining the club transformed his outlook.

As for career paths, Ms. Bullock is pursuing aerospace engineering; St. Kitts desires to become an aerospace scientist and Mathurin says he too will focus in the field of aerospace engineering.

Other notable persons at Sunday's awards ceremony included Pastor Jackie Kambui, Sen. Sammuel Sanes, Mrs. Stephanie Bullock and Mr. Vaughn Hewitt. The remaining Rocketry Club members are as follows: