

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Ivanna Eudora Kean Graduates 187 As Family And Friends Cheer On

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RED HOOK, ST. THOMAS -- The Ivanna Eudora Kean High School gym was at capacity on Saturday night, leaving standing room only for anyone who ventured into the building too late. The event: not a concert featuring a popular artist from abroad; not a sports affair where a team was crowned champion. Instead, parents, guardians and I.E.K.H.S.'s faculty and staff gathered to celebrate the milestone of graduation that 187 students had achieved.

Adorned in a yellow gown accentuated with a red sash, the graduates dazzled in their attire, sitting proudly as speakers of the night rightfully embellished them with praise.

The students amassed millions of dollars in scholarships and some were set to attend prestigious institutions abroad, while others had decided to stay home and spend their higher education years at the University of the Virgin Islands. Not less than 36 students were awarded Career and Technical Education scholarships, with 26 being part of the Jobs for Americas' Graduations program -- a state-based national nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing dropouts among young people who are most at-risk.

It was a proud moment for a school that had seen some administrative turbulence in recent years, according to Principal Stefan Jurgen, who has been at I.E.K.H.S. for one year. He noted strides that need to be made in multiple areas, and requested a moment of silence for a would-be graduate who lost his life in the recent upsurge of gun violence on this island.

"In the past four years you have had three principals, and I understand that the latter has come with much change, and change is not always easy to accept. But through that same change you have never strayed. You are resilient and you will adapt," Mr Jurgen said. "I promise you that my intention was not to prevent you from having fun, or to make your lives miserable. There was a rhyme and a reason behind each decision that was made. Those tough decisions were rooted in the belief that if pushed, if challenged, if encouraged, and if supported, you would become better, stronger, smarter and more skilled."

Even so, Mr. Jurgen mostly praised the students for their myriad of accomplishments, and counseled them to go beyond their achievement of high school graduation and become leaders.

Class salutatorian Sherkquan A. Henry spoke of challenges she faced when she started her journey at the school four years ago. She referred to those years as a war, and attaining victory not through overwhelming force, but by winning battles one at a time. She praised the 2016 class for achieving the milestone, and motivated her fellow graduates to win at life.

"Go out into your world and commit to your success," Ms. Henry said.

Valedictorian Micaiah A. Bully inspired graduates to go beyond finding a job and become business owners.

"Do not simply become a mechanic, own your own shop," he said. "Don't just work as a cashier at Kmart because college isn't right for you, strive for the managerial position. Be the best that you can be."

Governor Kenneth Mapp, as has been the case at each high school graduation this year, spoke of jobs available in government that are ready to be filled, and urged the graduates to visit the Division of Personnel to apply. He also implored the 2016 class to be mindful of what they post on their Facebook accounts, noting that employers often scan social media accounts of potential employees in an attempt to better know who they are considering as new hires.

And the commencement speaker, Lucien Stephenson, a 1986 graduate of I.E.K.H.S. and a financial adviser, gave a straightforward speech almost wholly focused on business ownership as compared to working for others, and urged the new graduates to stay in the

Virgin Islands. Calling them the smartest generation to ever leave high school, Mr. Stephenson spoke on the importance of decisions and how they affect destiny.

"Remember that all of your personal decisions will create your present and future environment. The large and small decisions you make will determine your quality of life. It will determine how happy you are, and which people are in your life. In other words, your life is a sum total of all the decisions that you make each and every day. Good and bad decisions will follow you your whole life," Mr. Stephenson said, as the 2016 class soaked the advice in.

So far, the public high schools in the territory have graduated 607 this year -- 211 at St. Croix Central High School, 209 at St. Croix Educational Complex, and 187 at I.E.K.H.S. The last public high school graduation this year happens today, when the Charlotte Amalie High School will award its achievers with their diplomas.

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