

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mission Accomplished: Charlotte Amalie High Graduates 245

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ST. THOMAS -- This weekend saw a total of 432 public high school students graduating on this island, bringing the territory-wide total for public schools this year to 852. The Charlotte Amalie High School contribution to that number was the greatest, with 245 students graduating -- 104 of which did so with honors.

And of the 245, over 100 were young men, said C.A.H.S. Principal Alcede S. Edwards, speaking at the event held in the U.V.I. Sports and Fitness Center, a breakaway from the notion that young men in the Virgin Islands continue to head down the wrong path. The principal asked the young men to stand, an action that made for a powerful statement as almost half of the Class stood.

"As a man, as a father and an alumni of Charlotte Amalie High School Class of 1979, I say to you in a few years, some of you may be celebrating your very own Father's Day. Society needs you to do well. Your family will need you to be strong, this community will need you to be great," Mr. Edwards said.

The principal went on to praise the 2016 Class for its achievements, listing a myriad of accomplishments, including over \$2 million in scholarship monies, which does not include students in the J.R.O.T.C. program, whose monies totaled \$1.1 million.

Of the 245 graduates, 172 will head straight to college, 7 will go to technical schools, 41 to the U.S. Army and 25 will head directly into the workforce. The 245 graduates represented 90 percent of the senior class, and once the summer school program is completed, the total number of graduates could reach 261, representing 96 percent of the 2016 senior class, Mr. Edwards said.

Class Salutatorian Kera Smith urged students to live their lives to the fullest. "Let's live always remembering that life isn't measured by the number of breaths you take, but by the number of moments that take our breath away."

But it was the 2016 Class valedictorian who stole the night. Opening her remarks with a prayer in Arabic, Aseel Mustafa delivered a powerful message in a clever and carefree manner, grabbing the attention of her audience from start to finish. It made the audience laugh, and yet raised graduates' confidence in being able to achieve whatever their dreams might be.

"Accept who are you, boldly walk forward not for only you, but for the persons who guided you. Have some compassion, continue to be determined no matter what," she said, later adding, "Excellence doesn't end here, we excel always." Ms. Mustafa was the only speaker on Sunday to receive a standing ovation.

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Governor Mapp, like the last three graduation ceremonies, told graduates that there were opportunities awaiting in government. He also admonished them to be careful with their postings on social media, as employers scan those platforms looking to find the true character of potential employees.

Senator Myron Jackson, representing the 31st Legislature, encouraged the Class to dream big and seek to accomplish what has been deemed impossible.

And keynote Speaker Lisa Phillips, a Charlotte Amalie Class of 1991 graduate, dared the Class to not only talk about something but make it happen.

"If you remember nothing else that I share with you, I want you to remember that you are the authors of your success. And you are authors of your own possibilities," she said. "And I hear you saying, 'What is that supposed to mean?' Well in simple terms, Class of 2016, whatever you said you were going to do, set goals and execute them. Open your book of possibility and chapter by chapter, begin to chart the course of the rest of your lives."

Feature Image: Joah Merrifield walks to receive his diploma. (Ernice Gilbert, VIC).

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