

The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Bright Spot, Scholarships Worth Thousands Awarded To Housing Community Students

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ST. CROIX -- In a conference room at Croix Ville Apartments, Cruselda Roberts, a social service coordinator and facilitator, one by one called the names and read the biographies of scholarship awardees -- students who were either already attending college or were set to enroll -- giving the reasons why they were chosen for awards worth thousands of dollars.

"Felicia, a resident of Harbor View Apartments, will be entering her freshman year at the University of the Virgin Islands," said Ms. Robert of scholarship recipient Felicia Daniel. "She dreams of becoming a neonatal nurse and plans on enrolling in nursing school once she obtains her bachelor's degree. She also wants to obtain her certifications in neonatal

resuscitation and neonatal intensive care nursing. The director of the AZ Academy says, 'She holds the bar high for herself and that truly motivates those around her!'"

The event, held yesterday, was a bright spot for families living in housing communities, as it shun light on the positive activities that take place at affordable housing and the



Left to right: Robert Williams, and UVI

freshman Felicia Daniel (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

Ms. Daniel was one of seven students who received scholarships for their academic successes and future academic endeavors from the Michaels Organization Educational Foundation; Ms. Daniel's scholarship being \$4,000.

The Michaels Organization, a privately held family of integrated but independent companies dedicated to excellence in affordable, mixed-financed, workforce, multifamily, military, and student housing, [according to its website](#), owns and operates three developments in St. Croix: Croix Ville, Canebrake and Harbor View Apartments.

The company's scholarship foundation solicits contributions from private entities that it does business with, and matches \$2 for every dollar raised, according to Roger Williams, outgoing vice president of Interstate Realty Management, the firm managing the Michaels Organization developments in St. Croix and St. Thomas.

This year the organization raised \$604,000 in scholarships awarded to 216 recipients. The firm has four properties in the Virgin Islands, the latest being a [housing community for seniors that recently opened in St. Thomas](#). The Michaels Organization boasts a total a 32,000 units in 32 states. According to Mr. Williams, the firm is the only management company and developer that has a scholarship program.



Staff of Interstate Realty Management, along

with scholarship awardees and their families. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

This year the company awarded \$15,000 to 7 recipients in St. Croix. Since 1973, 87 St. Croix students have received scholarships worth a combined \$204,800. To date, the organization has given out \$5.4 million to 2,400 recipients.

"They want to give back to the community and there's no better way to do it but education," Mr. Williams said.

Awardees present yesterday all expressed gratitude for the scholarships, some relaying how beneficial the monies will be as they pursue their academic careers, which could easily mount in costs with expensive books and tuition.

"This means a lot to me," said Ms. Daniel. "When you're a senior in high school, you have to search for all this money to pay for college, and I was really shocked when I got the monies from the Harbor View organization. It's a big opportunity that I'm not going to take for granted." She said the scholarship application process included academic performance report, an essay on her aspirations and recommendations from teachers about student performance and behavior.

Sonja Acosta, who was once part of the program having been awarded two scholarships while she attended U.V.I., [where she recently graduated with an associate of science in nursing \(ASN\)](#), attended Wednesday's ceremony to represent her two sons who were among the seven awarded scholarships -- one who's a computer science major, and the other who will study business management when he starts college this year. Ms. Acosta spoke of her own experience with the program, praising it for helping her through school.

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"When I was a nursing student I had a lot of expenses. I mean it was ridiculous. I would be on the road all day, and so gas and food add up. And the books are very expensive, so the scholarship really helped me," Ms. Acosta said.

A reoccurring theme yesterday as students stepped to the podium to speak, was the efforts of Ms. Roberts, as student after student thanked her for keeping at them to ensure that they met the criteria.

"I would like to say thank you to the Michaels Organization, and also to Ms. Roberts for helping me get the scholarship and everything she has done," said Lydaira Simon from Croix Ville Apartments.

Rachelle JnBaptiste, also from Croix Ville Apartments, thanked the organization for the scholarship, and expressed gratitude to Ms. Roberts for staying on potential scholarship awardees to ensure that criteria were met.

"I would also like to give a big thanks to Ms. Roberts for sure because she has stuck on us like a fly, making sure we get all our papers in. The support system is very strong and I thank her so much."

The scholarship ceremony is held annually. Mr. Williams said the Michaels Organization would love to give even more, and encouraged students living in the three housing communities to enroll for a chance to be selected next year.

St. Croix scholarship stats:

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