

The Virgin Islands Consortium

A 15-Year Commitment Continues As Sterling Optical Awards 15 Scholarships To College-Bound Students

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Ernice Gilbert **August 08, 2017**



ST. CROIX -- With well over 100 students having received scholarships over the course of 15 years, coming at an estimated cost of \$350,000, the founders of Sterling Opticle USVI showed no signs of slowing at a scholarship presentation ceremony this morning, where 10 St. Croix students who recently graduated from high school and are headed to college, each received a \$1,500 scholarship to benefit their education.

Five students in the St. Thomas-St. John district were to receive scholarships on Tuesday as well.

For some, investing \$350,000 in the community through which they've found success is a thought that never manifests itself, but for Dr. Joel Mahepath and his wife of 15 years, Dr. Lisa Adams, giving back is part of success. Speaking to the students at the St. Croix Sterling Opticle office this morning, Dr. Mahepath said, "The joy of living is in the giving." Earlier, Dr. Mahepath spoke of the nobility in the path that some of the wealthiest persons in the world have taken, choosing to give most of their wealth to charitable causes, as well as agendas to promote the well-being of humankind. The couple see their yearly giving of tens of thousands of dollars -- this year's total came in at \$22,500 -- as their part in making the USVI a better place.

Proudly, newspaper headline cutouts dating back to 2002 showing recipients of the annual scholarship presentation, line the walls of Sterling Opticle. Dr. Mahepath pointed to a 2013 cover of the St. Croix Avis, and said one of the students in that group had recently graduated from Harvard University with a degree in economics.

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At least two recipients that The Consortium spoke with expressed gratitude that they had received the scholarship, and vowed to do their best in school. "Getting this scholarship is a real relaxer to me because it helps push me to where I need to be," said Kristopher Fabio, 18, a St. Croix Central High School graduate who will be studying marine biology at the University of the Virgin Islands on the St. Thomas campus.

Dionara Alibocas, 18, a graduate of the St. Croix Central High School who will be attending Full Sail University, plans on studying digital arts and design. "Receiving this scholarship is very important because it helps me achieve my dreams, and no matter what, college education is really expensive, so it helps cut back on the costs," Ms. Alibocas said. She said there's an added responsibility that comes with receiving the scholarship. "Like, you don't just drop out and don't go back; you've got to go through it," she said.

Alene Springer, mother of Mr. Fabio, appeared radiant during the event, beaming with pride that her son had received yet another scholarship (four so far), to attend college. "I am very proud of him, he's worked hard during his school years; an honor roll student throughout his school career and he's doing positive things," Ms. Springer said. She spoke of some of her young son's many accomplishments, among them recent certification as a diver in a junior scientist program. In fact, Mr. Fabio was at Buck Island in the wee hours of Tuesday morning with the marine biologists of the National Park Service. "He was out there in that storm last night; they got in about 3:00 a.m. this morning," she said delightedly.

In May, Dr. Adams [told The Consortium](#) that education was the tool that enabled their success, therefore she and her husband saw education as the best way to give back. "Education is a big part of both Joel and myself. Because of education, we can do what we do. We've traveled the world, and so we feel that we have to give back to others in the community to have that opportunity," she said.

The power couple proudly announced the names of the 2017 scholarship recipients this morning, who in turn gladly received their award, stated their names and education intentions.

Today's recipients were: Ms. Alibocas, Mr. Fabio, Eric Henemann, STX Educational Complex student attending University of Wisconsin; Habeeba O'Neil, STX Educational Complex student attending Barnard College; Milan Philbert, St. Joseph High School student attending UVI; Daejah Scott, STX Central High School student attending Valencia College; Eva Taylor, Good Hope Country Day student attending Simmons College; XiaXiang Washington, St. Joseph High School student attending UVI; Eliu Murphy, Free Will Baptist School student attending the International American University; Joi Thomas-Lewis, STX Seventh Day Adventist School attending UVI; D'Shanee' Blake, Ivanna Eudora Kean student attending Washington Adventist College; Elijhaie Brathwaite, Charlotte Amalie High School student attending George Mason University; Khaleel Smith, STX Seventh Day Adventist School student attending UVI; Kendall Benjamin, Peter Gruber International Academy student attending Duquesne University; and Kajal Gopwani, All Saints Cathedral School student attending Fairfield University.

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