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## VI-PR Friendship Committee Presents Scholarship Awards to Two Complex High Graduates

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The Virgin Islands-Puerto Rico Friendship Committee recently presented 2020 scholarship awards to two outstanding high school graduates, according to a media release from the committee. The award ceremony took place at the Starlight Lounge on July 8.

Neisha Bennett and Shazim Ajani Brandy, both top 25 graduates of the St. Croix Educational Complex's Class of 2020, each received \$1,000 from the committee, according to the release. Netwave, through the generosity of Ana Foster and Luis Torres, presented the graduates each with an additional \$250 award. Semi-finalist Letisha Ayala was also awarded \$500 from Netwave. Applicants who were not selected as scholarship recipients received a \$50 gift card to Office Max as a donation from member and former committee president, Joseph Olmeda.

Bennett self-described as an active student, telling this publication during an interview that she participated in ROTC, advanced art club, and still did school-to-work at the St. Croix Animal Welfare Center. Next month, she will be attending UVI to study social work. When asked why she chose the aforementioned field of study, she said, "I've always helped people like my family and my friends if they have any mental issues."

Even so, Bennett did not appear to limit her career aspirations to one field. She also wants to study fine arts. "My parents want me to be an artist," she said, so she is also considering pursuing her interests in comics and animation.

Brandy shared during an interview with the Consortium that he also plans to attend UVI in the fall for at least 1 year. Thereafter, he said he would transfer to Elizabeth City State University in North Carolina to pursue his studies toward becoming an aerospace engineer. He applied for several scholarships in addition to this one since attending an institution of higher learning is not cheap, he said.

"I have a passion for aviation," said Brandy. His hope is to become a JetBlue Airways or American Airlines engineer.

Committee President Maria Colon-Clarke acknowledged the hard work of the students and the struggle their parents face to make ends meet. She said that the scholarships these students received were just a drop in the bucket, but they help. "Our students have excelled greatly and have had a tremendously rough school year," she said. "As they continue with their higher education, we want to celebrate them and remind them that they must always keep pushing as they continue to strive for higher learning and greater opportunities."

Dept. of Education Assistant Commissioner Victor Somme III thanked the committee for their donation to the students and applauded them for their focus on the children, stating that he knows firsthand the struggles students face when they attend college.

St. Croix Administrator Sammuel Sanes also expressed gratitude to the committee and charged the graduates to do their best and come back to invest in their community. "We are counting on you to make this a better place and thank you in advance for your return," he said. "This is a whole new world and time evolving in front of us. I am confident you will excel and return to take up the mantle of leadership to guide us. "