

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Owners Of Local Sterling Optical Invest \$19,500 Into College-Bound Students

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ST. CROIX -- Eight high school graduates from St. Croix will pursue higher education with a little more cash this fall thanks to the 17th annual Adams-Mahepath Scholarship awards.

They each received \$1,500 to pursue their academic dreams during a brief ceremony Tuesday at the Sterling Optical eye center in Golden Rock.

The Cost of Higher Education Today

According to [The College Board](#), the average annual cost for a four-year institution ranges from \$9,410 to \$32,410, depending on whether the student attends a private or public institute.

But for students like Jada Romer, Carissa Millette, Ajani Gordon and Miguel Martyr, the costs range from \$40,000 to \$60,000 per year.



Carissa Millette poses for a photo with her mom, Nidia Millette.

Miss Romer wants to become a medical research scientist and plans on attending Baylor University where she'll pursue a double major in molecular and cellular science and public health. It's going to cost about \$42,000 a year. Miss Romer said the Adams-Mahepath scholarship will "make the burden a little bit easier" on her parents and family who support her dreams.

Mr. Gordon said his computer engineering studies at the Florida Institute of Technology will cost \$60,000 a year. He recalled putting in "a lot of work" to apply for numerous scholarships to help cover the expenses. The work paid off as he is now the recipient of five other local scholarships from the following sponsors and entities: Denise Cromwell Brown, the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, Viya, the St. Croix Federation of Teachers and the Rotary Club of St. Croix.

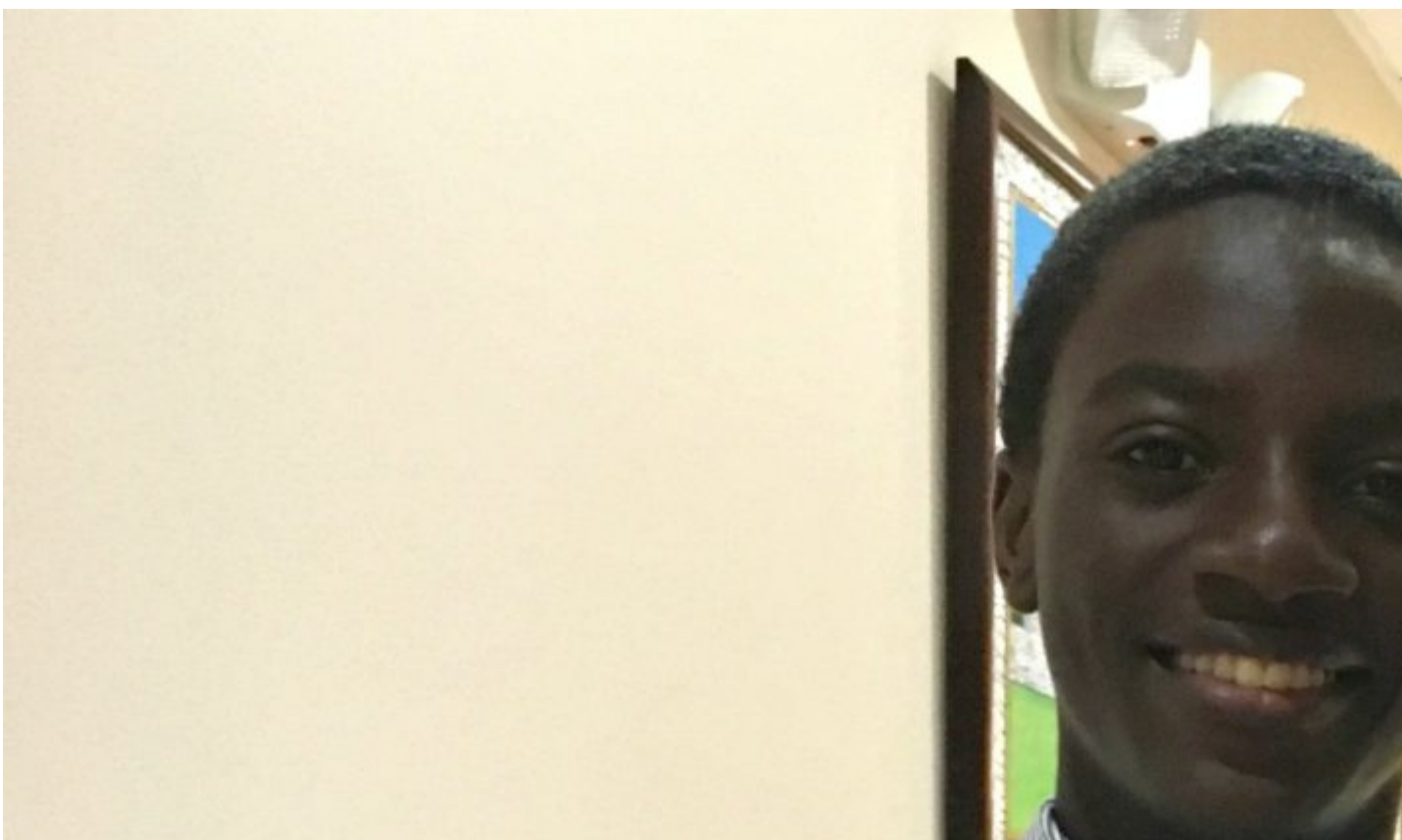
According to Mr. Gordon, the Adams-Mahepath Scholarship will add up with the others to help reduce costs.

Meeting the Criteria Unconventionally

To become an Adams-Mahepath Scholarship recipient, students must have at least a 2.5 grade point average (GPA) and exhibit community service. They must also have plans to further their education beyond high school.

During Tuesday's ceremony, Joel Mahepath, scholarship co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Sterling Optical's local branch, congratulated the students for meeting these requirements while dealing with the aftermath of two category five hurricanes during their senior year.

"You had no roofs. You had no power. You had no connectivity," he said. "And you also have shown perseverance because through the curfews, through the school sharing, double triple and how many other sessions that you had with the limited power and connectivity after the storm, you still kept moving forward."



Ajani Gordon and his mother, Samier Mitchell, pose for a photo, scholarship check in hand.

Miss Millette said she tried to finish all her assignments at school because electricity at home was an uncertainty in the aftermath of Maria and Irma. Nidia Millette watched her daughter struggle with the tug to relocate and finish her senior year abroad.

But the motivation to help rebuild the Free Will Baptist School outweighed the pull to leave, and Mrs. Millette also witnessed her 18-year-old exhibit commitment to the school into which she'd invested so much. Miss Millette ultimately decided to complete school here despite the obstacles.

Miss Romer said candlelight and the light from her father's car helped her finish assignments.

"I was a determined girl," Miss Romer said, "so we broke out the candles, and I was in my dad's car, and we'd sometimes use the light from the car to do my homework assignments. Or I'd sit in the dark with multiple candles around me, but I'd always find a way to get them done."

Mrs. Jacqueline Romer and Mr. Jason Romer described their daughter's effort as "inspiring."

"We are very proud of Jada," Mrs. Romer said.

Referencing his secret to success, Mr. Gordon gave credit to a strong circle of friends who he said kept him accountable during his senior year. His senior year consisted of a dual curriculum: college courses at the University of the Virgin Islands and Advanced Placement (AP) classes at the St. Croix Educational Complex.

"To be honest, I have to give props to my friends because it wasn't me studying alone. When you plan stuff with your friends, you have a responsibility. You don't want to break that responsibility," he said.

His mother, Samier Mitchell, expressed awe when thinking about her 17-year-old's work ethic.

"He actually stays up till 1, 2, 3 in the morning – everyday. And then do his homework and then goes to school. I don't know how he does it," Ms. Mitchell said.

Ms. Wilma Pinela, the mother of Whitney Warner, said that she and her partner sometimes broke curfew to go out in search of WIFI to help their 18-year-old meet her academic goals right after the storms.



Jada Romer (left), Jacqueline Romer (center) and Jason Romer (right) pose for a photo after the youngest Romer received her Adams-Mahepath Scholarship.

“We did things that we shouldn’t even have been doing just so she could meet her deadline,” she said.

Ms. Pinela called her daughter an “awesome kid,” commenting that not only did she manage to finish her senior year with high academic achievement, but Miss Warner was able to do so while working at Plaza Extra and while working as an attorney’s assistant.

Miss Warner couldn’t attend Tuesday’s ceremony because she’d already begun her nursing courses at the Houston Community College. Her mother received the scholarship on her behalf.

About the Adams-Mahepath Scholarship

Since 2002, Optometrist Lisa Adams and Mr. Mahepath have been sharing their success with rising generations as they partner to run the local Sterling Optical business.

“Education is important to us. Because of education, both of us have gone way beyond our parents. It’s important; I think that’s the key for young people,” Ms. Adams said during an interview Monday.

For the past 17 years, the husband-wife team have been funding local students with scholarship monies.

According to Ms. Adams, the applicant pool is usually large, but the impact of the hurricanes seems to have caused a decrease this year. She said a considerable amount of students from the territory had opted to go to the military or put off college for a year because of how they’d been affected. Another portion of students, the St. Croix native said, had migrated to complete their senior year elsewhere.

Sterling Optical had also been affected, and the business couldn’t afford to fund the usual number of students. Last year, 15 students received scholarships, and although the goal is to increase the number of recipients each year, Ms. Adams said it just wasn’t possible this year.

Nonetheless, 13 high school graduates were able to benefit from a cumulative \$19,500 that was evenly distributed among them.

Amanda Burton, a teacher at the Lew Muckle Elementary School and family friend of Mr. Gordon, expressed thanks to Sterling Optical for the contribution. She said Mr. Gordon was a good leader and role model for his peers. She was grateful to the eye care center for supporting him.



Miguel Martyr receives his \$1,500 check towards an electrical engineering degree at La Roche College. His mom, Sophia Martyr, smiles in the background.

"You look at this young man and all the things he was doing, and still he would go and tutor students at the high school. There's a lot of things that you don't hear, that they don't talk about," she said of Mr. Gordon. "But that's what good leaders do; they don't talk about everything they do, they just do it....We need a lot more like this, and we're thankful to Sterling Optical for being that support to these kids so they can go out there and do, and other kids can emulate them."

Shortly before Tuesday's ceremony, Sophia Martyr pointed to a speech she'd written via text message to thank Sterling Optical for contributing towards her son's electrical engineering degree. She was too shy to read it out loud.

"I would like to thank the eye center and the staff for considering Miguel for this award. It is greatly appreciated and will be put to great use for his future education" the text message read. "I know he will work hard to show you that he is worthy of this award."

During the ceremony, Mr. Mahepath urged all recipients to come back to the territory one day and invest the skills, knowledge and resources they'd acquired while on their academic journeys.

"And at the end of it, when you have left this territory and you have succeeded and you've conquered, please come back and do the same thing," he said.

The 2018 Recipients

The 2018 Adams-Mahepath Scholarship recipients include students from both St. Croix and St. Thomas. The following is a complete list of this year's recipients:

ST. CROIX

Ajani Gordon (S.C.E.C.) -- Computer Engineering, Florida Institute of Technology

Jacinta Mark (St. Joseph) -- Biology, La Roche College

Miguel Martyr (C.H.S.) -- Electrical Engineering, La Roche College

Carissa Millette (Free Will) -- Biomedical Science, Liberty University

Jada Romer (G.H.C.D.) -- Molecular & Cellular Science and Public Health, Baylor University

Kadysha Schoonmaker (St. Joseph) -- Biology, La Roche College

Whitney Warner (C.H.S.) -- Nursing, Houston Community College

Delva Daniel (St. Croix S.D.A.) -- Accounting, University of the Virgin Island

ST. THOMAS

C'Aylah Charleswell (C.A.H.S.) -- Business, Valencia College

Anjali James (All Saints Cathedral) -- Business, University of the Virgin Islands

Loron Robles (Ivanna Eudora Kean) -- Communications, Bethune-Cookman University

Javan Sterling (Ivanna Eudora Kean) -- Finance, University of Tampa

Dianysha Varfley (C.A.H.S.) -- Medicine, Gannon University

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