

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Six Young Men Graduate From 'EntrepreNow', An EDA Five-Week Summer Entrepreneurship Program

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ST. THOMAS -- The Economic Development Authority (E.D.A.) has announced that six young men ranging from ages 15-19 recently graduated from the five-week summer entrepreneurship program, EntrepreNow, which was created to inspire an entrepreneurship mindset among young men in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The EntrepreNow graduation ceremony was held on Friday, August 31, at E's Garden Teahouse and Things in Garden Street on St. Thomas.

According to the release, EntrepreNow was designed to assist young men in learning about their personal and professional interests, visualizing their educational future, and setting personal and professional goals. This program also helped these graduates, also known as the "Gentlemen of EntrepreNow", to learn about public speaking, leadership skills, the basics of preparing and presenting business proposals and marketing their products and services, according to the release.

This year, the participants of EntrepreNow also had the opportunity to engage with various community leaders and political representatives in the territory.

"This has truly been a journey for these young men. I consider these young men to be my family," said Nadine Marchena Kean, director of the Enterprise Zone Commission. "And it is certainly fulfilling to see another group of young men complete this program as a significant step for success in their lives."

The release said EntrepreNow is the brainchild of the Enterprise Zone Commission (EZC), an entity of the EDA that is responsible for the revitalization of distressed neighborhoods that were once vibrant centers of economic activity in the territory. Established in July 2016, EntrepreNow was created in partnership with the Office of the Territorial Public Defender of the U.S. Virgin Islands; the Department of Human Services; and the local, nonprofit organization Youth Arise, Inc., for young men ages 15 through 19.

At the graduation ceremony, the participants of EntrepreNow -- Ja'Haile Clendinen, Makim Archibald, Tasheem Monsanto, Ahyjah Lambertis, Konasha Griffith and Anthony Gerson -- spoke briefly about their experience and thanked individuals who supported them during the program. They also received words of encouragement from Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., EDA assistant chief executive officer and chief operating officer; Dr. Arlene Smith Christopher of Youth Arise, Inc.; and Raheem Smith, enterprise zone specialist.

The graduates also heard a testimonial from a 2017 graduate of EntrepreNow, Claudius Abraham, Jr., who is currently enrolled as a civil engineering major at the University of the Virgin Islands.

Each participant received a certificate of achievement from the EDA and the office of Senator Jeanette Millin-Young.

During this five-week program, which began at the end of July, the young men of EntrepreNow participated in classroom sessions and selected the following career tracks they desired to pursue: oceanography, video game developer, a baker, electronics repairs and trucking businesses. They also visited the UVI with a tour conducted by Kelani Rivers.

In addition to the UVI tour, the young men learned about business basics from Darryl Edwards of Straightpath Consulting, LLC; and shadowed local entrepreneurs Taj Siwatu of Buddha Sushi and Jeffrey Richardson of Xquizit Jewelers. Participants also met with business persons Reggie Vigilante of OmniSystems, Inc.; Rashidi Clenace of ViVid Streaming; and Jason Charles of Alpine Securities who all shared stories about their own challenges and successes during their journey to becoming and being business owners or leaders.

Along with the aforementioned, the participants competed among themselves for having the best business plan during a simulation of the popular business reality television series, “Shark Tank”, which is broadcast on CNBC.

To engage with local community leaders, participants visited the VI Legislature. These young men also had an opportunity to host their own USVI gubernatorial candidate forum in which they prepared for, and asked questions of the candidates, according to the release.

The men participated in tours of Fort Christian in St. Thomas led by Sean Krigger of the USVI State Historic Preservation Office and the Virgin Islands Port Authority (VIPA) Fire Department led by Fire Chief Adrian Kean. Cardow Jewelers and In Search Of, LLC, donated gifts and transportation services, respectively.

Feature Image: Pictured Left to Right: Chris Adamchak – RBS Specialist, USDA-RD; Michael Botelho; Area Director, USDA-RD; Sydney Spence Gruters, State Director, USDA-RD; Kamal I. Latham, CEO, USVI EDA; Cusa Holloway, Incubator Program Manager, USVI EDA; Mark Finch, Park Superintendent, V.I. Economic Development Park Corp., USVI EDA; Caroline Evans, CED – USDA-RD; Kimme Bryce, Area Director, USDA-RD; and Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., Assistant CEO/COO – USVI EDA participate in a tour of the William D. Roebuck Industrial Park on St. Croix. USDA State Director Gruters also congratulated USVIEDA officials on their grant award in the amount of \$50,000 for the purchase of a generator for the USVIEDA Incubator Program facility at the William D. Roebuck Industrial Park. -Photo by Shanell Petersen, Director of Marketing – USVIEDA (Credit: EDA)