

The Virgin Islands Consortium

SDA Class Of 2019, Only Four, Awarded More Than \$244,000 In Scholarships

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Shenneth Canegata **June 10, 2019**



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ST. CROIX – The St. Croix Seventh Day Adventist (S.D.A.) School held its commencement ceremony at Island Center for the Performing Arts on Sunday. Four graduates received a total of \$244,000 in scholarships. The graduates' aim is “to put our dreams in God’s hand, to allow God to put us where we belong,” with a motto that says, “What we are is God’s gift to us, what we make of ourselves is our gift to God.”

The keynote speaker, Dr. Leon Wilson, provost of the University of the Southern Caribbean, is a Guyanese-born educator and ground-breaking researcher. He advised

the graduates not to get caught up with the distractions of life. "Make time in your schedule to study," he said.

The valedictorian, Stacy Frederick, started by expressing, "This Elite graduating class of 2019 stands before you small in number, but powerful in perseverance, determination, and confidence." Stacey, who gained early entrance to U.V.I., has already earned 32 credit hours. She was awarded \$134,000 in scholarships and will continue her education at U.V.I. where she intends to pursue a degree in nursing.



Mahlana Grahama and Stacy Frederick

She dispensed a special message, not just to her parents but to her fellow graduates' parents as well. "We just couldn't have done it without your help. Throughout the years, we faced so many obstacles and challenges with our schoolwork, but you were always there as our number one supporter and encourager," she said in a show of gratitude. "You taught us to trust God... to persevere... to never give up. Thank you, parents and guardians, for investing in our future. We shall forever carry you in our hearts and live by the virtues you instilled in us."

The salutatorian, Mahlana Graham, has already earned 27 credit hours with U.V.I. as an early admission student, but is on her way to Oakwood University, a historically black SDA institution of higher learning in Huntsville, Alabama. There, Mahlana intends to pursue a degree in Biology. She received a \$48,000 scholarship from Oakwood, in addition to a \$5,000 Oakwood presidential scholarship, and \$8,000 from the Rotary Club of the Virgin Islands -- along with quite a few other scholarship awards. Mahlana shared that just as her high school English teacher taught her that a tone must be set in any form of literature, she stands as a graduate with a tone of gratitude, and a heart filled with excitement that must be shared.



Mahlana and Gerene Joseph

She has been the St. Croix S.D.A.'s Poetry Out Loud champion for the last four years, representing the Virgin Islands in Washington, D.C. twice, and securing a position in the top 12 of the 53 states and territories. "I am a product of Christian education, which has caused me to excel in everything I do," she said with pride. Mahlana also won first place in the senior division at the NCC Science Fair in Tortola, British Virgin Islands.

The overarching theme heard from the graduates was that with God on their side, they are able to accomplish anything.

Chanel Mia Aubert was awarded more \$40,000 in scholarships and will be attending Oakwood University. Shomari Francis received \$562 and will study at U.V.I.

Dr. Hamil Tobias delivered the benediction right before the graduates rose and took a final walk as high school graduates.

As Stacy poignantly said, "In my introduction, I described our class, the Elite Class of 2019 as a body of warriors – warriors for God, to be exact. The word warrior has so many connotations. Some positive, some negative. Of course, I am referring to the positive definition of a warrior. Let me define warrior for you. A warrior is a person who fights. The term "warrior" is often associated with images of power, confidence, accomplishment, integrity, chivalry, and honor. That's who we are! That's what this Elite Class of 2019 represents!"

Feature Image: The class of four pose for a picture (from left to right: Mahlana Graham, Shomari Francis, Stacy Frederick, Chanel Aubert). Images courtesy Wyndi Ambrose