

The Virgin Islands Consortium

'No Greater Joy Than Giving': Sterling Optical Owners Award \$21,000 In Scholarships To College-Bound Students

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"The greatest joy that a human being can derive is from giving. There's no other action that a human can take that would give you as much fulfillment and happiness as me giving you something, or you giving someone else."

Those were the words of Joel Mahepath, chief executive officer of Sterling Optical's local branch, speaking to the Consortium following the 18th annual Adams-Mahepath Scholarship awards ceremony, which was held at the Sterling Optical location on St. Croix Tuesday.

Mr. Mahepath along with his wife, Lisa Adams, co-founded the scholarship program that awards money to students from across the territory headed to college.

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.

"Education has been important to us in our lives that has given us the ability to succeed, whatever success is measured by. And so in that regard, we would like to see everyone succeed," Mr. Mahepath told the Consortium following the brief ceremony Tuesday.

The students along with their parents/guardians, stood together inside the store as Ms. Adams and Mr. Mahepath called out each recipient to collect their check. Students expressed gratitude while sharing their major and the college they have chosen to attend.

"This is always a happy time for us at Sterling Optical because it provides us the opportunity to promote one of our main principles, which is community involvement," said Ms. Adams.

She added, "Education is one proven way for upward mobility."

The couple started the program in 2002 with just four scholarships in the amount of \$1,250 each. "Today, I'm very proud to say fourteen students will receive checks in the amount of \$1,500 made out to their respective colleges, so we're very proud of that fact," Ms. Adams said.

N'Kayla Hughes, a graduate of the St. Joseph High School on St. Croix, who will be attending Laroche University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, said the Adams-Mahepath Scholarship is encouraging because it shows that persons in the community value the importance of education for the territory's youth.

"This scholarship means to me that people on St. Croix care about the youth of the island and want them to get a good education," she said.

Lamonique Berrios, a graduate of the St. Croix Central High School who has enrolled in Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas, said the scholarship is highly appreciated because it eases the burden on her parents relative funding her education. Ms. Berrios's major is computer engineering, and she envisions working at Apple, one of America's most valuable companies.

Each year, the Adams-Mahepath Scholarship highlights two students for high performance in certain fields. This year, academics and arts were chosen, with Alayna Caraballo -- a CHS graduate who has enrolled in the School of the Arts Institute of Chicago, and Mahlana Graham, an honor graduate of the St. Croix Seventh Day Adventist School who has enrolled at Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama, being highlighted.

Ms. Caraballo was the 6th top graduate at CHS and placed 1st in the VI Congressional Arts competition. Ms. Graham graduated top of her class and placed 1st in the Poetry Out Loud competition twice.

St. Croix Recipients

Alayna Caraballo, Esonica Charles, Nia Coates, Michael Dow Jr., Mahlana Graham, N'Kayla Hughes, Lamonique Berrios, and Malik Maillard.

St. Thomas-St. John Recipients

Vernisha Hodge, Diantha Mathews, Radiance Peetes, Jahquan Richards, Kamal Tyson, D'Shae Xavier

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