

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Breaking Barriers: Aeronautics Student From USVI Urges Support for Local Aviation Education

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Training aircraft at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (ERAU) on Daytona Beach, Florida. By. FLYING MAG.

The territory needs to respond to growing interest in aeronautics locally by pumping more resources into aviation education, says 21-year old Virgin Islander Agathe Emeran, a student at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (ERAU) on Daytona Beach, Florida.

Ms. Emeran is at one of the premier institutions for aviation and aerospace programs, studying air traffic management with minors in air transportation, applied meteorology and international history. She wants to become an air traffic controller and also continue

her education with a masters of business administration in the aviation industry.

Getting to this point was not easy, Ms. Emeran says. During her time at Charlotte Amalie High School, the St. Thomas native says she heard about an aviation program that had been offered to students, but learned that it had been dismantled before she started at the school. "I feel like if we had something like that in high school that can definitely help a lot of students prepare themselves for the aviation industry," Ms. Emeran mused..

In her senior year, she decided to pursue her private pilot license which she obtained in 2021 via UFLY VI, one of two aviation schools on St. Thomas. Despite the availability of training institutions and a chronic [pilot shortage](#) exacerbating challenges to intra-territory travel, access to aviation education is limited by lack of funding or scholarships for pursuing aviation studies, Ms. Emeran said.



Agathe Emeran, far right, received the 2021 Frankee Hellinger Memorial Undergraduate Scholarship from WTS. (Credit:

During her own hunt for potential scholarships, whether from the V.I. Board of Education or other granting institutions, “it’s always for business, nursing, athletics,” Ms. Emeran lamented. However, she is encouraging interested young people not to be deterred from pursuing studies in the aviation field.

“It’s really not easy but it’s definitely worth every second of it,” she said, adding that “there’s moments where you want to stop... you want to cry... it’s expensive... but you still have to push yourself.”

Even in the face of all the barriers to access, Ms. Emeran noted that the small numbers of Virgin Islanders at Embry-Riddle are increasing. In 2020, her freshman year, there were about five students at the university from the USVI – including herself. The following year, that number more than doubled.

Part of the reason for the jump, Ms. Emeran believes, are the success stories of VI aviation professionals that have been published in the recent past, including those of USVI-born pilots flying home at the helm of aircraft owned by [American Airlines](#) and [United Airlines](#).

She also wanted to highlight other Embry-Riddle graduates currently making strides in the field. For example, Fitzgerald Boezem Jr., operations manager of the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport, holds a masters of business administration in aviation management from the institution.

Ms. Emeran noted that a current Embry-Riddle student from the Virgin Islands, who is on track to graduate this year with a degree in aeronautical engineering, has already received a job offer from Boeing, the world’s largest aerospace company.

Emeran wants to see a shift in public policy to better reflect the enthusiasm Virgin Islanders show in aviation and aeronautics, and the success they have been achieving in these fields.