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A Historic Commencement: Charlotte Amalie High School Bids Farewell to Iconic Buildings

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The Charlotte Amalie High School Graduating Class of 2023 at the Elridge Wilburn Blake Sports and Fitness Center on the University of the Virgin Islands' Orville E. Kean Campus in St. Thomas. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

The Class of 2023 from Charlotte Amalie High School (CAHS) added their names to the pages of history as they participated in the 92nd commencement exercise of the revered institution. Not only did they celebrate their triumphs and milestones, but they also bid a sentimental farewell to the historic school buildings scheduled for demolition this summer.

Principal April Petrus, custodian of the legacy of the "mighty mighty Chicken Hawks", orchestrated the ceremony to honor this crucial juncture. Addressing the assemblage of students,

alumni, faculty, parents, and well-wishers on Friday, she acknowledged the magnitude of the event. "This legendary class will forever hold the distinction of being the last occupants of the buildings raised 68 years ago," she declared.

Petrus was quick to emphasize, however, that the spirit of the school was not confined to its physical environment. She affirmed, "The walls do not embody the love, pride, and honor that our community feels for this great institution. Its celebrated achievements won't vanish. The pride and the legacy of dominance of the Hawk will endure in the hearts of our students, alumni, staff, parents, and supporters."

Despite facing two years of disruptions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the resilient Class of 2023 has carved a distinguished place for themselves in the annals of CAHS. The 220-strong graduating class has excelled both academically and athletically, winning district championships and earning various accolades. The class comprises 124 honor graduates, 44 high honor graduates, 50 members of the National Honor Society, six AP scholars, and five students who have been admitted early into college.

Principal Petrus urged the graduates to carry the CAHS spirit forward. "Use the skills and knowledge acquired at CAHS to make a difference in colleges, workplaces, and communities. Let your talents, intellect, and creativity resonate in every corner of the world and let them understand why the world is Hawks territory."

Class Salutatorian, Mariella Stout, commended the student body's resilience during the turmoil. Stout advised her peers to "focus on goals, not on obstacles," while Valedictorian Waniya Baig reminded the class to see obstacles as motivation and failures as learning opportunities.

Keynote Speaker and Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, an alumna from the Class of 1983, echoed these sentiments, sharing lessons from her own journey, including balancing unexpected pregnancy with her studies. Frett-Gregory's three cardinal points of advice were: "begin with the end in mind," "stay ready so you don't need to get ready," and "give yourself grace."

Governor Albert Bryan took the stage to share the realities of his leadership role, urging the students to control their reactions to life's external triggers, emphasizing that optimism is a choice.

"I have two moods: fantastic and fan-freaking-tastic. But sometimes, this job gets to me," Governor Bryan confessed to the students, shedding light on the often overlooked pressures of his role. Amidst the mundane frustrations of life, the governor emphasized the inevitability of bad days.

He added, "You can't control the weather, the environment, what other people do, or what's going to happen to you in the economy," Bryan said. "But you can control how you react." Bryan further underscored the importance of choosing optimism, expressing that his abundant smiles stem from his choice to embrace happiness.

The governor also revealed a new scholarship opportunity for those proceeding to tertiary education. It requires these students to submit an essay to the Board of Education detailing their experiences with the coronavirus.

The Class of 2023, as they took their final steps from the historic school building, embodied the enduring spirit of the Hawk, carrying the legacy of CAHS into their futures.

