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## ACE Champions Innovation in Historic Year, Celebrates Triumph at Annual Graduation

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Janeke Simon **May 20, 2023**

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**St. Thomas-St. John Adult Continuing Education Class of 2023. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE**

The St. Thomas-St. John Adult Continuing Education (ACE) on Friday held its groundbreaking annual graduation ceremony, highlighting an academic year filled with "firsts".

In her remarks, Principal Rhona Pinney-Simon applauded the innovative spirit of both staff and students. "When a body works together, great things happen," said Pinney-Simon, praising the formation of the institution's first-ever student council. Nadia Auguste, Lakeria Paulas, Daquana Penn, and Grace Percival received resounding applause for their exemplary work aiding the office staff, planning events, and fostering camaraderie among their classmates.

Another milestone this year was the inaugural educational scavenger hunt, wherein students honed various skills ranging from teamwork and reading to problem-solving. Simultaneously, this event promoted physical activity and healthy competition, rewarding the triumphant team with free tuition for the subsequent semester.

December 15th marked the debut of the Victory Walk, an initiative designed to raise public awareness about the difficulties adult learners encounter in juggling family, work, friends, and personal time. Pinney-Simon recognized the significance of these breakthroughs in guiding students towards achieving their high school diplomas.

This year, the ACE school also launched its premier disaster awareness training program, which was delivered in English, Creole, and Spanish to cater to the significant ESL population.

Salutatorian Grace Percival delivered a heartfelt speech chronicling her personal journey. After dropping out of high school and later resuming her education, Percival emphasized the power of resilience and the importance of not allowing past mistakes to dictate the future.

In similar vein, Valedictorian Anneka Stridiron, a proud mother, underscored the value of hard work and dedication, attributing her academic success to her children who served as her motivation.

Keynote speaker Mahalia Joseph, currently studying psychology, shared her transformative story of overcoming personal and academic hurdles at ACE. She encouraged the graduates to pursue higher education irrespective of the challenges that may arise, drawing from her own experience as a single mother who balanced work, college, and family.

Nadia Auguste, one of the top 10 students, extended her heartfelt thanks to the school and the Department of Education as she celebrated a double achievement—obtaining her high school diploma and earning a medical administrative certificate.

Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach, during his address, narrated three poignant stories to illustrate the far-reaching impacts of choices. He highlighted the transience of fame, the profound loss of potential, and the power of leading by example, each narrative driving home the importance of making wise decisions.

Roach applauded the graduating students as “outstanding examples” of taking control of their lives despite adversity. He also assured the students of the government's commitment to higher education, referencing the bill he supported to provide free admission to the University of the Virgin Islands. “Your educational journey can continue as far as you want to take it,” Roach reassured the graduates.

The St. Thomas-St. John Adult Continuing Education graduation ceremony was a triumph, symbolizing a year of unprecedented achievements and a resilient, supportive, and innovative community.