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Young Virgin Islanders Showing Entrepreneurial Spirit



Twenty Five Virgin Islands high school students got hands-on business training, formed teams and vied for prizes for the best conservation-oriented business plan in the V.I. Resource Conservation & Development Council's "Youth Conservation Entrepreneurial Retreat" at Carambola Beach Resort this week.

The council partnered with James Amps III and his A.M.P.S. Entrepreneurship and Leadership Institute to put on the retreat, with a little help from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"We wanted to spark their interest in agriculture and conservation, for them to understand these are fields

where they can start a business and to spark them into thinking about planning for their future," said council President Diane Capehart just before the four teams showcased their business plans before an audience of teachers, family members and friends at Carambola Friday. She credited Faye Williams of the council for both the idea for the retreat and the drive to make it happen.

Amps has been holding youth entrepreneurship retreats for seven years now, he said. All of the retreats focus on the process of creating a business plan and setting up a business, but this was the first one to have an overarching theme or focus, he said.

"Saving the earth is powerful," he said. Each team had to settle on a particular business, whether making a product or providing a service. Then they had to research that type of business, put together startup expenses, unit costs, profit and loss projections and the basic information that would form a business plan which could in principle be shopped to investors, Amps said.

"The youth had to do it all themselves," Amps said. Each team also had to decide who would hold the various executive positions in the businesses, develop a simple marketing strategy. The teams put together and performed a 30-second commercial for their product, then made a PowerPoint presentation of their mission statement, profit and loss projections, startup and unit costs and other aspects of their business plan.

One team proposed a business called "Renew to Reuse," selling reusable shopping bags made from recycled plastic bags, showing they would have to sell 6,900 bags the first year at \$1.75 apiece, to net just over \$4,000 in profit. Another, called "MegaTek," proposed designing a sort of

tablet for students, similar to a Kindle or other book reader, upon which students could receive all of their textbooks, take notes and do assignments.

“If we partner with McGraw Hill to present their textbooks, they will not have to print so many books, saving the environment and money too,” said Kwame Simmons of the MegaTek team.

A third, “Cult’ral Couture,” would sell handbags, jewelry and clothing made from indigenous plants, seashells and other natural, local materials. And a fourth suggested forming an environmental consulting service called “Business in a Green Box,” that would offer customized plans for businesses to conserve energy and water and become more environmentally friendly.

The judges could not decide on a single winner, so “MegaTek” and “Renew to Reuse,” both took first place. Their two team presidents won free travel, tuition and fees to go compete against 150 students from 15 countries at Amps’ “Ultimate Life Summit,” in Orlando, Fla. this July.

The other two teams will split a \$2400 cash prize.

The real prizes, though, were the knowledge, experience and exposure to entrepreneurship that all the students received, said Juan Casimiro, who worked with the A.M.P.S. Institute on the retreat.

“These folks you saw today know how to do their research, they know how to plan and set up a business,” said Casimiro. “So they are better than your average student.”

On the “Cult’ral Couture” team were: Carlotta Cornelius, Jonathan Emanuelli, David Lopez, Llewelyn Taylor and Carina Burr.

Team “Renew to Reuse” featured: Areya Christian, Tawawna Abraham, Khalid James and Patrick Leonard,

The MegaTek crew were: Malik Henry, Dynel Martinez, Sha-Quan Joseph, Kwame Simmons and Nakima Marclouis. “Business in a Green Box” were: Terrance James, Cahtriellah Shabazz, Nia Hazell and Caressa Burr.

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