



## THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

### Office of Public Relations

Telephone: 340.774.0100 (STT/STJ) 340.773.1095 (STX)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**January 15, 2025**

**0108-25**

**For More Information Contact:**

Shayla S. Solomon

Director, Public Relations & Communications

[shayla.solomon@vide.vi](mailto:shayla.solomon@vide.vi)

[www.vide.vi](http://www.vide.vi) ~ [www.facebook.com/usvi.vide](https://www.facebook.com/usvi.vide)

## **Virgin Islands Film Academy Empowers Students Through Innovative Filmmaking Program**

The Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) is thrilled to celebrate the extraordinary success of the Virgin Islands Film Academy, a groundbreaking eight-week program held in the St. Thomas-St. John District. Spearheaded by renowned filmmaker and proud Virgin Islander John P. Wheatley, this initiative transformed high school students from Charlotte Amalie High School and Ivanna Eudora Kean High School into creative filmmakers through hands-on training and mentorship by industry professionals.

“When we started the Virgin Islands Film Academy, we dreamed of creating more than just a program. We sought to build a bridge connecting our talented youth to the vibrant world of professional filmmaking,” said John P. Wheatley, Executive Producer of the VIDE Film Academy. “Over these past eight weeks, our 24 remarkable students have done more than learn about camera angles and script development. They have discovered their voices as storytellers, problem solvers, and creative leaders.”

This dynamic program fosters creativity, teamwork, and professional development, providing students with essential skills for potential careers in the film and media industry. The VIDE extends its deepest gratitude to Mr. Wheatley and his exceptional team for their unwavering commitment to inspiring the next generation of Virgin Islands filmmakers.

**A Team of Visionaries** - The success of the Virgin Islands Film Academy was made possible by the dedication of its extraordinary staff, comprised of talented Virgin Islanders with vast experience in media, film, music, and production: Geneva Weeks, Gerda Morales, Anthony Nibbs, and Keano Brin. Joining this team were leading industry professionals: AZ Yeamen, Genia Nooks, and Brandon Thaxton, a renowned acting coach. The program also offered students the unparalleled opportunity to learn from special guest instructor Robert Townsend, a Hollywood legend celebrated for his contributions as an actor, comedian, director, producer, and television executive. Mr. Townsend’s expertise provided students with invaluable insights, leaving a lasting impact on their filmmaking journey.

### **A Red-Carpet Finale**

The program culminated in a red-carpet premiere on January 12, 2025, at the Ritz Carlton Ballroom. The event showcased the students’ two captivating films, leaving an audience of parents, guardians, school administrators, VIDE leadership, and supporters in awe of their talent and storytelling prowess.

**Film 1: Moonlight Diner – View Here** <https://youtu.be/bpGqzWUrEc>

**Synopsis:** When her babysitter’s car breaks down, young Taylor ventures into an abandoned diner searching for her missing mother. What she discovers inside is far from what she expected.

**Cast and Crew:** Ava Daniel, Dalton George, Arielle Saint Paul, Emerson Hyppolite, G’Nyaii Dorelien, Je’mar Matthew, Marcus Jean, Aaliyah Paul, Kaysa Freeman, Lemuel Liburd, and Jahquan Laronde.

**Film 2: The Game – View Here** <https://youtu.be/R9dAg0wTk3E>

**Synopsis:** Two aspiring basketball players and best friends, Cameron and Jace, work hard to achieve their dreams, but Cameron’s personal life spirals out of control, jeopardizing their future.

**Cast and Crew:** Samara Warner, Dream Allen, Harmony Allem, Shawriya Benjamin, Dashe Duncan, Justin Arellano, Elyssa Brewley, Joe’Niah Clendinen, Jaylen Benjamin, K’lijah Hodge, Kenli Merrifield, Chainye Toussaint, Anijah Joseph, Soirie Merrifield, Daniel Nganga, Samirah Acosta, Felix Willie, and Kyan Smith.

**View Behind the Scenes: VIDE Film Academy Recap -** <https://youtu.be/MMbptycypw>

### **A Collaborative Community Effort**

The Virgin Islands Film Academy was a testament to the power of community collaboration. The VIDE acknowledges the support of the St. Thomas-St. John Office of the Insular Superintendent, program coordinators, and community partners. Special thanks go to: Rashidi Clenance, PriceSmart, AJ’s Market, Frenchtown Deli, Petrus Gas Station, and Moe’s Market Yacht Haven Grande, Bluebeards Hotel, Westin Frenchman Reef, Ritz Carlton Hotel, Exclusive Limo & Taxi Services, Westline Productions, Black Dragon Security, Vivid Streaming, The Virgin Islands Consortium, Pick & Go Car Rental, Omari Hicks, and MDM.

The Virgin Islands Film Academy has set a new standard for youth empowerment and creativity within the Territory. By nurturing talent and inspiring confidence, the program has equipped students with skills that extend far beyond filmmaking.

###