

Twenty-Three Students Graduate from Junior Sailing Summer Program – Hosted by St. Thomas Sailing Center & Supported by VIPCA and RapierMed

St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. Graduation from the Junior Sailing Summer Program on July 31 at the St. Thomas Sailing Center marked not the finish line, but the beginning of a lifetime of confidence, competence, and enjoyment on the water for twenty-three St. Thomas teens. The free program for U.S. Virgin Islands public school students was presented by the Virgin Islands Professional Charter Association (VIPCA) through its nonprofit Marine Rebuild Fund and made possible by a \$25,000 annual sponsorship from RapierMed LLC, a St. Thomas-based medical and healthcare investment group. Now in its sixth year, the program has introduced nearly 100 students, ages 12 to 17, to sailing and seamanship.



Photo: Community support in full force for the Program's graduation. Credit: Carol Bareuther.

Next Generation Learns to Navigate the Seas

Sailing down big waves off the east end of St. Thomas proved a highlight for 16-year-old Quinnton Caines. "I liked sailing and driving the Hobie Waves best."

For Caines' mother, Avril Dyer, participation in the

program marked a continuation of her son's love of the water. "He's an accomplished swimmer, having finished third in his age group at the Beach-to-Beach Power Swim on St. John this year. Next, we wanted him to explore boating, and this was a great avenue for him."

The graduates completed 10 fun-packed days of learning to sail after completing swimming lessons at the St. Thomas Swimming Association pool.

"Sailing Hobie Waves and IC24s, they learned nautical knots, sailboat parts, tacking, gybing, and person-overboard drills. For many, it was their first time experiencing the incredible marine environment surrounding St. Thomas. Daily adventures included snorkeling, swimming, and an all-day excursion to Cas Cay. Watching students overcome their fear of capsizing, gain confidence, and then focus on improving their technique and speed has been incredibly rewarding. We are proud to inspire the next generation and share the magic of the ocean with them," says Bobby Brooks,

director of the St. Thomas Sailing Center, based at the St. Thomas Yacht Club, near Red Hook.



Photo: Hobie Waves were a favorite of the teen campers. Credit: Carol Bareuther.

On land and at sea, instruction was provided by the St. Thomas Sailing Center staff, which included Brooks, Hailey Hathaway and Spencer LeGrande. Parents were treated to a sail with their teens at the helm on graduation day before the certificate presentation.

"RapierMed is proud to sponsor the Junior Sailing Summer Program since its inception and for the 6th consecutive year. We believe investing in young people is one of the most meaningful investments we can make in our community. This program provides far more than sailing instruction—it builds confidence, develops practical skills,

and opens doors to careers in the Virgin Islands' marine industry. Watching graduates leave with the knowledge and experience to pursue those opportunities is exactly the kind of impact we hope to support. We congratulate this year's class and look forward to seeing where their journey takes them," says Dr. George Rapier, president, RapierMed, LLC.

The 2026 Junior Sailing Summer Program graduates are Destine Bryan, Quinnton Caines, Priceberd Cesar, Tristan Daniel, De'Mari Davis, Amarni Douglas, Ryon Espinal, Malikai Frontal, Czakem George, Giovanni Gordon, Icezavia James, Myken Joseph, Elensky Loranvil, Maleah Marie, Elijah McCants, Jaden Meade, Samuel Jean Pierre, Earl Questel, Aden Stapleton, Ajoni Stapleton, Tristen Tatum, Jordan Vanterpool, and Kisha Xavier.

CITs (Counselors in Training) for 2026 were Kennedy Ambo, Victoria (Tori) Aubain, Czade George, Terrance George, Paul Hayes, Elijah Perryman, Jayden Shackell, and Leah Williams.

"We are thrilled every year to see this program continue to grow. The Jr. Swim Sail Program, thanks to RapierMed, marks a crucial step in developing the future of the marine industry and blue economy in the Virgin Islands. We're grateful this year for the additional publicity and partnership that the Office of Gun Violence Prevention has brought to the program," says Kennon Jones, Executive Director of VIPCA.



Photo: Teen campers took their parents sailing to show their skills. Photo: Carol Bareuther

A special thank you to Jones; Serina Blanco, director of special projects and compliance for RapierMed; Senator Marvin Blyden; Office of Gun Violence Prevention Staff – Antonio Emanuel, executive director, Bruce Flamon, Community Outreach Coordinator St. Thomas, and Rev.

Dr. Gerald McDonald, Survivor Engagement Specialist St. Thomas; and St. Thomas Yacht Club Board Members Laura Martin, Emily Zimmerman, and Mike Chappell.

Summer Student to Captain

Graduates of the Junior Sailing Summer Program can continue learning valuable marine skills in the After-School Sailing Program, also held at the St. Thomas Sailing Center, and sponsored by IGY's Yacht Haven Grande St. Thomas. The program begins in January, takes place each Wednesday afternoon, and is free to Junior Sailing Summer Program graduates. This initiative has grown from four returning students to over 15 aspiring sailors.

These two youth programs serve as a gateway to VIPCA's Marine Apprenticeship Program, supporting young adults aged 18-30 in becoming employable within the USVI marine industry, with the opportunity to earn their USCG OUPV Captains' certifications. The St. Thomas Sailing Center teaches a five-day learn-to-sail course as part of the apprenticeship program.

For more information and to help sponsor these youth programs, please call (340) 690-3681, email: director@stthomassailingcenter.com, or visit: www.stthomassailingcenter.com. Or, visit: www.vipca.org/junior-sailing-summer-program, and www.vipca.org/youth-training

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