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CTEC STUDENTS LEARN KEY HOSPITALITY INSIGHTS FROM DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM OFFICIAL

ST. CROIX, USVI -- Students enrolled in the St. Croix Career & Technical Education Center's Academy of Hospitality and Tourism, and the Academy of Finance recently enjoyed a presentation from the Department of Tourism on the importance of preparing themselves to be the next generation of leaders in the Virgin Islands tourism industry, particularly on St. Croix.

Teacher Sherese Blake invited Department of Tourism Assistant Communications Director Sharon Rosario to offer students practical advice on the hospitality industry, the importance of good customer service, and other topics.

"You must be customer-oriented in order to work in the hospitality industry," Rosario began.

Drawing from her own career experiences, which involved working for a commercial airline and other travel-related roles, Rosario told students "when choosing your career, choose something that makes you happy everyday" and further encouraged them to "choose hospitality as your first choice."

Rosario, a St. Croix native, maintains her passion for hospitality is partially attributed to St. Croix's rich history.

"We reside in a living history book here in the Virgin Islands," she said, adding, "Tourists most love hanging out with the locals. They come here to experience our culture. What I like most about this business is sharing my home with visitors and seeing home through their eyes."

Rosario further informed the 10th and 11th graders that the hospitality industry is not only comprised of traditional hotel-front desk roles and the like. She pointed out that the industry

encompasses a wide range of professions, such as marketing, journalism, design, accounting, photography, entrepreneurship and more.

When it comes to contributing to the growth of the tourism industry in the Virgin Islands, Rosario said everyone has a part to play.

"Keeping local streets clean and litter-free is important and I encourage you to use travel as an opportunity to teach people about the Virgin Islands wherever you go," she said. "Be proud of where you're from."

Blake said the goal of the activity, now in its third year, is to help students "make connections between what is being taught in the classroom and what is happening in the real world, especially on St. Croix."

She went on to say that many of the Academy's students have held jobs or internships at local hotels, such as the Buccaneer on St. Croix, and at the Department of Tourism.

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