

PRESS RELEASE

May 18, 2012

ESSEX COUNTY FREEHOLDERS CONGRATULATE HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS PETER COLLINS, UCHENNA OKOSA & SHARON JOHNSON RECIPIENTS OF 2012 “GOVERNOR’S AWARDS IN ARTS EDUCATION”

(Newark, NJ) – During its Thursday, May 17, 2012, meeting held at the Hall of Records, the Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders honored three high school seniors, Peter Collins and Sharon Johnson of Newark, and Uchenna Okosa of East Orange, for being named recipients of 2012 Governor’s Awards in Arts Education. Peter Collins earned his Governor’s Award for Excellence in Vocal Music, Sharon Johnson earned her award for Excellence in the Humanities, and Uchenna Okosa earned hers for Excellence in Fine Arts. All three students were presented with their Governor’s Awards during a ceremony held at the Trenton War Memorial in Trenton on Thursday, May 10th.



2012 recipients of Governor’s Awards in Arts Education, Uchenna Okosa of East Orange (right), Peter Collins of Newark (center) and Sharon Johnson, also of Newark (represented by her mother, Octavious Johnson – left), were presented with commendations from the Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders during the Board’s Thursday, May 17th, meeting held at the Hall of Records.
PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

The Governor’s Awards in Arts Education program began in 1980 to promote awareness and appreciation of the arts, recognizing the creativity, talent and leadership of award winners. The

awards are presented to students selected by national and statewide organizations for their exemplary work in creative writing, speech, dance, music, theater and visual arts, as well as to leaders for their exceptional commitment and contribution to arts education. The program also recognizes arts educators and arts education advocates whose leadership has helped to nurture the development of students in the arts across the state.



Freeholder Rufus I. Johnson of Newark (left) presented the Board's Commendation to Peter E. Collins, a senior at Arts High School (right). **PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON**

Peter E. Collins, a 17-year old senior at Newark's Arts High School, qualified for his Governor's Award for Excellence in Vocal Music after being selected by ACT-SO (Afro-Academic Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics), an academic and cultural enrichment program sponsored by the NAACP that mentors young people in grades 9-12 and seeks to promote the following among students of African-American descent: positive self-esteem, positive interaction between youth and the adult professional community, positive academic and artistic excellence, and high academic and cultural achievement. Peter participated in the 23rd Annual New Jersey State ACT-SO Competition held on Saturday, April 21, 2012, at Central High School in Newark where he won his Gold Medal in the Music Vocal Classical category for his rendition of "Quia Fecit Mihi Magna"; he was presented with his Gold Medal the next day during the organization's Annual Award Ceremony. Peter has been a participant in Newark ACT-SO for two years and will go on to represent Newark at the 33rd National ACT-SO competition to be held in Houston, Texas, from July 5-8, 2012.

Peter is also a talented musician who plays the violin, guitar and piano, and composes original music. At Arts High School, he is a member of the Chorus and the Junior Entrepreneur’s Club. He also sings with the AOC Choir in Brooklyn, New York, and with the group, “Gifted”. Peter will attend Liberty University in the fall where he intends to pursue a degree in Industrial Engineering and to minor in Music. He is the son of his proud parents, Peter and Marcia Collins, and the brother of Sekou and David.



In honoree Sharon Johnson’s absence, Freeholder President Blonnie R. Watson (left) of Newark presented the Board’s Commendation to Sharon’s proud mother, Octavious Johnson. **PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON**

Sharon M. Johnson, a 17-year old senior at Roselle Catholic High School in Roselle, who was awarded her Governor’s Award for Excellence in Writing, also qualified for the award after being selected by ACT-SO. Like Peter, she too participated in the April 21st New Jersey State ACT-SO Competition where she won her two Gold Medals in the Humanities, one for her play, “Ms. Millie’s Hats”, and the other for her poem, “Toy Soldier”, which explores the travesty of war; she was presented with her Gold Medals the next day during the organization’s Annual Award Ceremony. Sharon has also been a Newark ACT-SO participant for two years, has received state gold medals each year for her writing in the Humanities categories of playwriting, poetry and original essay, and will join Peter in representing Newark at the 33rd National ACT-SO competition to be held in Houston, Texas, from July 5-8, 2012.

At Roselle Catholic High School, Sharon has participated in many activities and held several leadership positions. She has served as Captain of the Varsity Cheerleading Squad, Vice President of the Senior Executive Board and Secretary of the Spanish Honor Society. She is also a member of the National Honor Society and the Softball Team. Outside of school, in addition to her active participation in the ACT-SO Program, she works at Funplex Indoor Amusement Park and the Kumon Learning Center, where she enjoys working with and educating the next generation. Sharon will attend the University of Maryland, College Park, in the fall where she intends to pursue a degree in Journalism, and aspires to be an editor of a magazine, a television anchorwoman, and/or an author/playwright. She is the daughter of her proud parents, Octavious and Charles Johnson, and the younger sister of Generra.



Freeholder Carol Y. Clark of East Orange (right) and Uchenna Okosa, also of East Orange, took a break from the presentation of the Board's Commendation to admire Uchenna's self-portrait.
PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

Uchenna Okosa, an 18-year old senior at Eastern Christian High School in North Haledon, qualified for her Governor's Award for Excellence Visual Arts after being selected by VSA New Jersey, a nonprofit organization founded in 1978 and affiliated with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., that is dedicated to promoting the creative power of people. She was presented with her VSA New Jersey award at a ceremony held on April 28, 2012, at the Linwood Middle School in North Brunswick. Uchenna was nominated for this award by her high school teacher, Jesse Rey Wright, in whose Painting and Web Design classes she was enrolled. Uchenna's portfolio was submitted to VSA New Jersey and then reviewed by

a panel of New Jersey artists in an adjudication held on February 18, 2012, along with her biography, letters of recommendation, her interview and the highly stressful and pressure-packed requirement that she create an original artwork on the spot.

Uchenna has been very active in Eastern Christian High School activities. She performed in the school's productions of "Scheherazade", "Up the Down Staircase" and "Willy Wonka", as well as the Talent Show all four years. She is a member of her Class Council, serving on the Prom Committee and working on the Senior Breakfast, and is a dance instructor for "Just Dance 101". An accomplished athlete, Uchenna has been a member of the Cross Country Team, the JV Basketball Team and the Varsity Track and Field Team, where she has competed in the Long Jump and was a member of the 4x4 Relay Team that won the North Jersey, Non-Public B Sectional Championship. She will attend Kean University in the fall to study Fine Arts. She is the daughter of her proud parents, Noel and Ruth Okosa, and the sister of two younger brothers.

The Board's Commendations were presented to the honorees by Freeholder President Blonnie R. Watson and Freeholder Rufus I. Johnson of Newark, and Freeholder Carol Y. Clark of East Orange. The ceremony was highlighted by demonstrations of the honorees' talents: Uchenna Okosa displayed and discussed two of her drawings, including an impressive self-portrait; Peter Collins wowed the audience by performing "Quia Fecit Mihi Magna", for which he won his ACT-SO Gold Medal and Governor's Award; and excerpts from Sharon Johnson's award-winning and powerful poem, "Toy Soldier", were read aloud by Deborah Smith-Gregory, New Jersey State Chairwoman of the NAACP ACT-SO Program.

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