

PRESS RELEASE

July 10, 2014

ESSEX COUNTY FREEHOLDERS HONOR THE NEW JERSEY AFRO ACADEMIC, CULTURAL, TECHNOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC OLYMPICS (ACT-SO) 2014 NEW JERSEY STATE GOLD MEDALISTS



Members of the NJ ACT-SO 2014 State Gold Medalists, ACT-SO Co-Chairs and sponsoring freeholders. Pictured above left to right: (1st Row) Amber Brown-Kelly from Newark for Sculpture, Shá Daia Leach-Smith from Irvington for Vocal Music Classical, Aaron Sherrod from Newark for Dramatics, Photography and Poetry and Khiana Jonai Wiley from Newark for Vocal Music Contemporary. (2nd Row) Madrid K. Danner-Smith from Irvington for Oratory, Kwasi Nimako from Newark for Mathematics, Nia Pierce from East Orange for Music Instrumental Contemporary, Demetrius Beckham from Newark for Medicine and Health, Freeholder Carol Y. Clark, NAACP Representative Tommy Puryear. (3rd Row) Freeholder Rolando Bobadilla, Freeholder Leonard Luciano, ACT-So Co-Chair Deborah Smith-Gregory, Freeholder Gerald Owens, Freeholder Vice President Patricia Sebold, and ACT-So Co-Chair Darnell Davis. PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

(Newark, NJ) – During its Wednesday, July 9, 2014, meeting at the Hall of Records, the Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders honored The New Jersey Afro Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics (ACT-SO) 2014 New Jersey State Gold Medalists. The Board's commendations were sponsored by At-Large Freeholder Gerald W. Owens, At-Large Freeholder President Blonnie R. Watson, At-Large Freeholder Rufus I. Johnson and District I Freeholder Rolando Bobadilla.

Freeholder Owens, a resident of South Orange, opened the program by commending the New Jersey ACT-SO Gold Medalists from Essex County who took top honors in their individual categories of competition at the recent New Jersey State ACT-SO Awards Ceremony that took place on May 4, 2014, at the State Awards Gala held at Masso's Orchard in Glassboro, New Jersey. Freeholder Owens was elated to acknowledge the local NAACP ACT-SO Gold Medalists for a second consecutive year. Although not a sponsoring freeholder, District 4 Freeholder Leonard Luciano from West Caldwell was on hand to share in the festivities and gladly delivered highlights from the commendation in Freeholder Rufus Johnson's stead.

Finally, Freeholder Rolando Bobadilla of Newark, together with Freeholder Luciano followed with introductions of each Gold Medalist and presented them with their well-deserved commendation.

ACT-SO is an enrichment program consisting of 27 categories under the headings of Science, Humanities, Visual and Performing Arts and Business. The program promotes a climate of academic and artistic development and more than 5,000 area high school students have participated in the ACT-SO workshops around the state. ACT-SO is an approved partner of the New Jersey Governor’s Arts in Education Awards Program; where selected students were honored in June at an awards presentation in the area of dance, creative writing, music, visual arts and theater. This year’s Gold Medalists will have the distinguished opportunity to compete for scholarship dollars at the national competition held July 17 – 20, 2014, in Las Vegas, NV in conjunction with the Annual NAACP Convention.

The Gold Medal winners from Essex County who won top honors in the statewide competition and will compete in the national competition are; Kristy Baez from Newark for Drawing; Demetrius Beckham from Newark for Medicine and Health; Amber Brown-Kelly from Newark for Sculpture; Madrid K. Danner-Smith from Irvington for Oratory; Lorian Hines from Orange for Painting; Shá Daia Leach-Smith from Irvington for Vocal Music Classical; Wesley May from Newark for Original Essay; Kwasi Nimako from Newark for Mathematics; Nia Pierce from East Orange for Music Instrumental Contemporary; Aaron Sherrod from Newark for Dramatics, Photography and Poetry; and Khiana Jonai Wiley from Newark for Vocal Music Contemporary.

NJ ACT-SO Co-Chairs, Deborah Smith-Gregory and Darnell Davis were in attendance and extended appreciative and congratulatory remarks. Ms. Smith-Gregory thanked the freeholders for acknowledging the students and admonished, “Our children need us to surround them. It does take a village, it does take us to believe in them and have faith in them and to support them by being positive in a very trying and challenging society.” Mr. Darnell Davis also thanked the board for the award and noted that they (the co-chairs) are just two representative adults of a whole community of parents and extended family who come together to make this work. He spoke of the ACT-SO Program’s 24 years in the greater Newark area progressing from humble means with very little support to what it is today. He noted. “investing in young people is a way of life and there is no substitute for it.” He thanked the families for their affirmation of the program.

The presentation was concluded with performances by two of this year’s Gold Medalists. Madrid K. Smith, who took the Gold Medal for Oratory on the state level for the second consecutive year and second place in last year’s national competition held in Orlando, FL. Madrid shared a moving rendition of his original work entitled, “*Accepted, Deferred, Rejected*”. The message as he dramatized; “In all simplicity, I want to leave in this room a message that I don’t want to stay in this room. Tell your friends and associates, to tell their friends and associates, that acceptance from yourself is more important than acceptance from others. Take deferment as a time for refinement and reject the fear of rejection.” Finally, Nia Pierce who took Gold for Music Instrumental Contemporary performed her winning selection entitled, *Great Day* and concluded with the Grammy Award song by Pharrell Williams, *Happy* both played on the Harp.

Also, District 3 Freeholder Carol Y. Clark was in attendance and gave greetings, as well as Freeholder Vice President Patricia Sebold and NAACP Representative Tommy Puryear.

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