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Bay Ridge **First Brightest Star Awards Recognizes Achievements by People With Developmental Disabilities**

by Brooklyn Eagle (edit@brooklyneagle.net), published online 11-19-2009

Of the dozens of individuals who entered The Brightest Star award competition — and the ten remarkable finalists who took the stage at Block Institute on November 14 — only one could be selected as New York City's first 'Brightest Star.'

That honor went to 31-year-old Calvin Greene of Bensonhurst, whose outstanding achievements in leadership were an inspiration to all present.

The awards gala honored individuals with developmental disabilities, aged 18 and older, who have made extraordinary achievements in one of the following areas — spirit, leadership, wellness, talent, independence, mastery, fellowship, citizenship, growth and community.

A panel of judges was tasked with selecting the best and brightest from among the finalists. They included Miss New York 2009, Alyse Zwick; CBS2 News Anchor Kristine Johnson; Julie Revelant, deputy editor of NY Metro Parents; and WKTU Mix Show Jenny Costa.

"Each of the finalists is a remarkable individual whose stories touched our hearts," said Johnson. "Selecting one Brightest Star from among them was an incredibly difficult decision. They are all winners."

Ten contestants ranging in age from 25 to 72 prepared for the last two months for this night, each aided by a volunteer coach who was a former community pageant contestant or winner. The coaches helped the contestants produce a three-minute video that was shown at the gala, prepare an on-stage performance, select formal wear and get dressed for the event. All of the contestants showcased their talents and achievements with the help of their coaches and sponsors.

"We are excited to be celebrating the achievements of the adults we serve with a unique and distinguished award," said Dr. Scott Barkin, executive director of Block Institute. "Our Brightest Star winner, Calvin Greene will serve as an inspiration and mentor to others here."

In addition to Greene, each of the following finalists were recognized for outstanding achievements in their respective category:

Helen Benson, Mastery
John Campbell, Independence

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From left to right are Miss New York, Alyse Zwick; Miss Metropolitan, Amanda Mason; Miss Brooklyn Contestant, Diana Green; Brightest Star Winner Calvin Greene; Miss Brooklyn, Keelie Sheridan; Miss Manhattan, Inga Shlingmann.

Joseph Carrera, Talent
Hoa Hua Cen, Growth
Benita Glatt, Citizenship
Aman Khaja, Community
Mark Lotti, Spirit
Hanan Makovitski, Wellness
Guy Mondesir, Fellowship

Based upon the success of this first Brightest Star Awards, Block Institute hopes to expand this program to individuals with disabilities who are served by other programs across the community in the future.

Block Institute, at 376 Bay 44th St., is dedicated to improving the quality of life for all people, primarily the developmentally disabled and their families. Block Institute also offers educational and therapeutic services to young children with a variety of developmental disabilities and neuromuscular disorders.

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