

Disney VoluntEARS Mentor Florida's Boys & Girls Clubs Youth of the Year

Local High School Senior Finds His Voice and Shares His Uplifting Story

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. May 11, 2011- Recently named the "State of Florida Youth of the Year," Ahkeem Hollimon credits support from Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Florida's Tupperware Brands Branch and several Disney VoluntEARS for helping make his dream come true.

The Osceola International High School senior competed against 24 other Florida teens last month for the prestigious award, which recognizes service to the Boys & Girls Clubs and the community, academic success, strong moral character, leadership quality and public speaking ability.

In preparation for the competition, Hollimon worked with Walt Disney World Ambassador Jennifer Mason and Walt Disney World manager of internal communications Shelby Curry to refine his inspirational speech, which explained how his local Boys & Girls Club helped him overcome obstacles in his life, including the death of his older brother (who was the victim of a fatal shooting), instability at home and constant bullying because of his size.

"Ahkeem is a very intelligent young man who has inspired me," said Curry. "He has had to overcome so much in his young life, but because of his drive and motivation he continues to persevere despite these challenges."

"Jennifer and Shelby really helped me put into words the positive impact my Boys & Girls Club has had on my life and how it's turned me into the young man I am today," said Hollimon. "The programs I participated in at the Club pushed me away from gang violence and gave me great opportunities, including a trip to Germany at the European Boys & Girls Clubs Teen Conference where I represented the organization."

A week after receiving the award, Hollimon met Florida Governor Rick Scott who honored his achievement. He will now compete at the regional level with the hopes of participating in the Club's national competition before starting classes at Valencia Community College, where he plans to study business management.

The shared goal of helping and protecting the youth of Central Florida as they grow into young adults defines the strong relationship between Walt Disney World and Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Florida. Disney is actively involved in Boys & Girls Clubs through volunteerism and funding. This year's "Benefit Preview Cruise" aboard the new Disney Dream raised \$750,000 for the Central Florida Clubs and gave 45 local members and their families an experience to remember aboard the new ship. The company also recognized Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Florida through its Disney Helping Kids Shine Grants program, awarding the organization \$100,000 this year.

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