

Walt Disney's Mantra for 'Dreaming Big' Remains Alive as Disney's Dreamers Academy Celebrates Five-Year Milestone

Celebrity Panel of Judges Led by TV host Steve Harvey to Select Next 100 Students for Dreamers Academy Class of 2012

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla., (December 2, 2011) — The legacy of visionary Walt Disney includes an impressive list of trail-blazing accomplishments. One outcome of his passion for motivating those around him to “dream big” inspired Disney’s Dreamers Academy with Steve Harvey and Essence Magazine, a four-day power-packed program for high school students uniquely designed to inspire youth to chart successful career paths.

Now entering its fifth year, more than 500 high school students will have participated since Disney’s Dreamers Academy opened its doors in 2008.

On Dec. 4th, 2011, a celebrity panel of judges led by “Family Feud” TV show host, philanthropist and Disney’s Dreamers Academy champion Steve Harvey will gather in Atlanta to review applications and select the next 100 high school students who will become the Class of 2012 Disney’s Dreamers Academy. The criteria used to select the Disney Dreamers includes exhibiting curiosity, compassion and leadership skills.

Disney’s Dreamers Academy with Steve Harvey and Essence Magazine, scheduled for March 8-11, 2012, takes place in what many have called the world’s most creative classroom – the Walt Disney World Resort. The Academy inspires and fuels the dreams of the selected students to help them dream bigger, discover a world of possibilities and get a jump start on making those dreams come true.

The students engage in multiple activities, including interaction with a range of industry professionals to an immersive introduction to various career paths. Disney’s Dreamers Academy students participate in workshops on a variety of subjects including entertainment, entrepreneurship, the medical field, culinary arts and creative inspiration from Walt Disney Imagineering, the creative gurus behind Disney Parks’ theme parks and attractions.

“Many years ago, Walt Disney himself said, *‘If you can dream it, you can do it,’*” said Tracey Walters-Powell, executive champion of the program for Disney Parks & Resorts. “Dreaming big and encouraging students to pursue their dreams are at the core of Disney’s Dreamers Academy and reaching this five-year milestone means we’ve touched the lives of more than 500 students and given them that boost of confidence that everyone needs.”

“I am so thrilled to celebrate five years of teaching teenagers how to dream big” said Steve Harvey, who has served as Ambassador of Disney’s Dreamers Academy since the program started. “These kids already have the big dreams when they walk through those doors. We simply show them how to achieve those dreams. We encourage them to believe in themselves and to focus on their future now. We tell them how we achieved our successes, and suddenly you see the light bulb turn on for them.”

Essence Communications President Michelle Ebanks said, “All you need to do is talk to some of the students who have participated in Disney’s Dreamers Academy to hear how it has impacted their lives in such an incredible way. There are so many success stories and we keep adding more and more each year.”

Two recent graduates from the Class of 2011 Disney's Dreamers Academy — Diamond Sims of Miami, Florida, and Princeton Parker of Los Angeles — were invited to share their stories on the popular blog Huffington Post.

"Disney's Dreamers Academy was a part of my life that I will never ever forget," said Sims, who is now a freshman at University of Florida. "I met people who are from the same place as I am. I met people from all types of professions who were willing to provide advice, guidance and encouragement. In only a few days, they helped mold me into the young woman that I am today."

Parker, 17, who will start his first year of communications studies at University of Southern California next year, said: "Disney's Dreamers Academy changed my life not only by enlarging my dreams and understanding, but also by introducing me to more than 100 other young visionaries who possess the same drive, tenacity, vigor, and capacity to dream."

Celebrity Panel of Judges to Select Class of 2012

Judges for the Class of 2012 *Disney's Dreamers Academy* class will include: Harvey; Mikki Taylor (Editor-at-Large, *Essence* Magazine); Walters-Powell (Executive Champion, Disney's Dreamers Academy); Yolanda Adams (Gospel Music Legend); Terrence J (BET host of *106 and Park*); Stephen A. Smith (Broadcaster and Sports Analyst); Dr. Steve Perry (Education Advocate and CNN commentator); Sonia Jackson-Myles (Founder and Author, *The Sister Accord*); Jonathan Sprinkles (Award-winning Motivational Speaker); Chef Jeff Henderson (Food Network TV host of *The Chef Jeff Project*); Brandi Harvey and Karli Harvey (Co-founders of Young, Fit and Fly)

For additional information and updates on the program please visit www.disneysdreamersacademy.com or www.facebook.com/disneysdreamersacademy. You can also follow on Twitter [@dreamersacademy](https://twitter.com/dreamersacademy).

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About Essence Communications Inc.: Essence Communications Inc. (ECI) is the number one media and communications company dedicated to African-American women. With a multi-platform presence in publishing, live events, and online, the Essence brand is "Where Black Women Come First". The company's flagship publication, *ESSENCE* magazine, is the preeminent lifestyle magazine for African-American women, generating brand extensions such as the Essence Music Festival, *ESSENCE* Black Women in Hollywood, Window on Our Women (WOW I & II) and Smart Beauty I, II & III consumer insights, the Essence Book Club, *Essence.com*, and ventures in digital media (mobile, television and VOD).

About Walt Disney World Resort / The Walt Disney Co.: Walt Disney World Resort is a contiguous 40-square-mile, world-class entertainment and recreation center located at Lake Buena Vista, Fla., 20 miles southwest of Orlando. The Walt Disney Co. has a rich legacy of creativity and exceptional storytelling that brings families together in unique and memorable ways. Creative excellence is coupled with a strong commitment to community service and diversity. The Walt Disney Co. is dedicated to making a positive impact in communities around the world, with a primary focus on brightening the lives of children.