



Youth Development Foundation, Inc.  
*Promoting Culture & Education Through the Performing Arts*

## 35 Contestants Celebrate 35 Years of Excellence and Vie For Title At Hal Jackson's Talented Teens International Competition

*International Finals Culminate In St. Maarten, July 30, 2005*



Miss HJTTI 2004 Nicola Dalrymple shows her trophy



Sheryl Lee Ralph and Hal Jackson with Nicola



St. Martin Tourist Board Members Lloyd Tackling & Romeo Fleming welcome Debi & Hal Jackson

**New York, NY** (BlackNews.com) - When 35 female contestants, ages 13-17, fly to the island of St. Martin for the 35th annual Hal Jackson's Talented Teens International Scholarship Competition, which takes

place July 23-30, 2005, not only will they celebrate the contests 35th year, but one talented performer will emerge as the world's most talented teen.

It seems like just yesterday that the legendary Hal Jackson, the Dean of radio and 21-year veteran of the WBLS-FM radio station program, Sunday Classics (the longest running live radio broadcast in the country), created the first talent competition targeted specifically for young women of color. Before Star Search, before American Idol and other reality television series, Hal Jackson's Talented Teens International Competition (HJTII) afforded many young women a stage on which to showcase their poise, personal achievements and performing talents. Many of these women went on to pursue a career in either the arts or any other field of their choice, partially based on scholarships they won and the contacts they made through the competition.

Household names like music television, film and Broadway stars Vanessa L. Williams, Sheryl Lee Ralph, Jada Pinkett Smith, CeCe Peniston and the late Michelle Thomas are among the thousands of contestants who came up through the ranks of the competition, which is based on personality and achievement, youthful teenage appearance, and the talent segment of the show. Over the years many of these luminaries have returned to their roots, lending their celebrity status and mentorship to many teenage hopefuls.

This year's contest will culminate Saturday, July 30, 2005 at the Royale Casino Theater, at 7 pm in St. Maarten/St. Martin, Netherlands Antilles. The week's festivities, which begin when the contestants fly to the island on July 23, include tours around the island, a beach party, lunch with local dignitaries as well as a stopover at a local butterfly farm. In between sightseeing and bonding with each other, the contestants (delegates) adhere to a rigorous rehearsal schedule for the finals night in which they will participate in three production numbers, featuring current international winner, Nicola Dalrymple, a 16-year-old singer/actress/dancer from Trinidad & Tobago. Both R&B legends Chuck Jackson and former Hal Jackson's Talented Teens International winner, Tai Jimenez, prima ballerina at the Dance Theater of Harlem, will be featured guest performers at the event. Co-hosts for finals night will be former international contestant Kimberly Brooks, now seen on Showtime's Huff, along with WBLS-FM air personality Doctor Bob Lee.

"It's a great feeling to have reached 35 years with the program, even though it has not seemed that long," says the program's Founder and CEO Hal Jackson, Group Chairman of ICBC Broadcast Holdings, Inc. in New York. "I see so many young ladies and I have watched how they have developed and used their talents to go through to the next stage of their lives. And the support we have received from the entertainment industry and other corporations has been wonderful."

The scholarship program's Executive Producer, Debi Jackson, wife of Hal Jackson and his co-host for Sunday Classics, emphasizes the global opportunities afforded to winners as a significant aspect of the program which is sponsored under the auspices of the non-profit corporation, The Youth Development Foundation, Inc. "I think that for me, one of the highlights of our 35 years has been when we were able to expose some of our young ladies to their African heritage by taking them to the Motherland. We have been able to take some of the winners to such places as Egypt, Senegal, The Ivory Coast and Ghana," she recalls.

In recent years, winners have been able to visit such places as Paris, London, and many islands in the Caribbean through trips sponsored in part by the countries departments of tourism. "We have also been able to offer many young ladies scholarships to the colleges of their choice," Debi Jackson adds. "It has been estimated, that in the past 35 years, The Youth Development Foundation, Inc. has been able to offer cultural trips and prizes valued at over one million dollars."

In addition to honoring the 35 delegates during the week, the Youth Development Foundation, Inc. will honor three New York-based residents who have made significant contributions to Hal Jackson's Talented Teens Scholarship Program at the annual Shooting Star Awards dinner which will take place

poolside in a villa on the French side of St. Martin on Thursday, July 28. This year's Shooting Star Awards honorees include Charles M. Warfield, COO and President of ICBC Broadcast Holdings Inc., Elinor R. Tatum, Publisher and Editor In Chief of The Amsterdam News and Tai Jimenez, prima ballerina of The Dance Theater of Harlem and past Hal Jackson's Talented Teens International winner.

After 35 years, Hal Jackson's Talented Teens International Scholarship Program remains unique in a myriad of ways. Still the only talent competition of its kind for young ladies ages 13-17, at least one-third of the HJTII contestants come from countries outside of the United States, including such places as Canada, St. Lucia, Anguilla, Antigua, the US & British Virgin Islands and Bermuda. Having won the contest on their state or country level, the delegates will vie for such prizes as a \$5,000 college scholarship, a diamond ring, a trip to London, air sponsored by Alken Tours, as well as a trip to the British Virgin Islands, sponsored by the British Virgin Islands Department of Tourism.

For press inquiries and more information, contact Cynthia Horner at [hornercynthia@yahoo.com](mailto:hornercynthia@yahoo.com) or Maria DeLestre at 212-592-0413.

[www.talentedteens.org](http://www.talentedteens.org)