

Tourist business takes Brooklyn Public Library's top entrepreneurial prize

By Stephen Witt

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A business that created a win-win situation became the big winner itself in taking the Brooklyn Public Library's top prize in their 6th annual PowerUP! competition.

Stacey Toussaint and Sheila Collins nabbed the \$15,000 grant top prize for their Inside Out Tours business whose mission is to bring tourist dollars to local communities, as well as to introduce visitors and residents alike to the history and vitality of Brooklyn.

The PowerUP! competition rewards the entrepreneurial spirit of Brooklynites with the best business plans.

Although Toussaint and Collins live in Prospect Heights and Clinton Hill, their business is currently based out of Park Slope's Brooklyn Creative League, 540 President Street.

Its premise is to offer cultural walking and bus tours of Brooklyn designed to give visitors an intimate look at the artistic, social and cultural diversity of the borough.

"We take you off the beaten path where you meet the locals, learn about the culture and taste the food, and because we're natives of Brooklyn, we're able to offer that," explained Toussaint.

Toussaint said they will focus on four tours starting with a multi-ethnic tasting tour where participants will visit such places as Little China along 8th Avenue in Sunset Park and Little Latin America also in Sunset Park as well as other neighborhoods that feature ethnic cuisine.

Other tours include a Brooklyn Gospel Tour where visitors will go to the various churches in the borough and learn about their rich history, a Brooklyn After Dark Tour, where visitors will get to see some of the cultural institutions such as BAM and other nightlife, and an Afro-Caribbean Tour where visitors will go to such neighborhoods as Bedford-Stuyvesant, Fort Greene and Clinton Hill.

The two second-place winners, earning \$5,000 grants each, went to Vandra Thorburn's Vokashi Kitchen Waste business and Evelyn Oliver and Darell Brown's Organic Bed-Stuy business.

Vokashi Kitchen Waste involves recycling and disposing of kitchen refuse through a bran product that quickly ferments discarded food and distributes it to composting sites where it becomes organic soil.

Organic Bed-Stuy will offer quality food at affordable prices to a neighborhood that lacks enough healthy food choices.

Earning merit awards (\$750 each) was Park Slope resident Gregory Fanslau and Laura Werts for their business idea, 86 List, a networking and job posting website for the NYC restaurant business; Camille Newman of Canarsie for Pop Up Plus - pop-up stores for plus size women; and Simeon Doytchinov of Marine Park for NCS Enterprises, Inc., a software company which offers a multi-dimensional reporting application.

Earning honorable mentions (\$500 each) was Bridget Goldsmith of Flatbush for Coconut Expressions, a coconut milk based ice cream products made with all natural ingredients; Patrick Guglielmo and Eric J. Snyder of Clinton Hill for Mama's Boys Café and Collectibles, a neighborhood café; and Emily Morgan of Boerum Hill for KinderKALENDARS, a manufacturer and distributor of bilingual day-at-a-time wall calendars specifically designed for young children who speak English as a second language.

To date, more than \$125,000 in prize money has been awarded by the program's sponsor, Citigroup. Applications for the 2010 PowerUP! competition and workshop series will be accepted this spring. See below for a list of merit and honorable mention winners.

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