

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Taste of Beauty Weekend, May 14 & 15, to benefit Georgians with disabilities

SU alumni and filmmakers team up with BBI for documentary screening, talent show

ATLANTA, Ga. – How do you define beauty? Creators of the documentary, *Defining Beauty: Ms. Wheelchair America*, are teaming up with the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) at Syracuse University – Atlanta office to explore that question during Taste of Beauty Weekend, May 14 and 15. Proceeds will support the initiatives of BBI’s Atlanta office, including career coaching, job shadowing, and summer internships for people with disabilities.

The weekend events in Atlanta include a talent showcase featuring youth and job seekers with disabilities as well as a VIP screening of the documentary. “The Taste of Beauty weekend is a great opportunity for us to showcase the importance of inclusion and originality,” says Manuela Ikenze G’01, executive producer of *Defining Beauty: Ms. Wheelchair America*. “Our collaboration with BBI’s Atlanta office will help to advance the lives of Georgians with disabilities.”

Defining Beauty: Ms. Wheelchair America is a thought-provoking documentary, narrated by Golden Globe winner Katey Sagal, about the vibrant lives of five women with disabilities on their journey to the 2010 Ms. Wheelchair America pageant. “The documentary not only breaks stigmas and raises awareness for the Ms. Wheelchair America Organization, but also is a great educational tool,” says Alexis Ostrander ’07, documentary director.

BBI’s Shelley Kaplan, one of the event organizers, notes the impact community involvement in the event can have. “When it comes to career exploration, youth with disabilities are not given ample opportunities due to lack of accessibility, unfounded fears, and stereotypes that result in limited networking experiences. The money raised from Taste of Beauty will support efforts in Atlanta to change that, specifically through BBI’s disability career coaching and mentoring programs.”

By partnering with Atlanta businesses, BBI matches students with appropriate mentors in choice careers and partners with businesses to help them find outstanding new talent while also considering diversity and inclusion in their hiring practices.

For Molly Kasch and Meagan Keane, producers of *Defining Beauty: Ms. Wheelchair America*, working on the film has been a transformative experience. “My perspective about people with disabilities has changed,” notes Keane. “We hope people are just as moved as we were by the inspirational stories of these young women,” says Kasch.

For detailed information about Taste of Beauty Weekend and to purchase tickets or contribute, visit www.tasteofbeautysoutheast.org.

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Schedule of Events

Saturday, May 14, noon – 4 p.m.

Talent Showcase

Marcus of Atlanta (MJCCA) - Zaban Park, 5342 Tilly Mill Road, Dunwoody, Ga.

Finalists with disabilities will showcase their unique talents in song, dance, and oratory skills in front of an esteemed panel of judges. Judges will include **Cassius D. Kalb**, Grammy award winning writer/producer for the Bruno Mars hit “Just The Way You Are.” (***Kaylin Reque**, Miss Georgia USA 2011, has been invited; her attendance is subject to availability.)

Sunday, May 15

VIP Reception and Private Screening

A private screening of the documentary and silent auction.

About Defining Beauty: Ms. Wheelchair America

Defining Beauty: Ms. Wheelchair America is a thought-provoking documentary, narrated by Katey Sagal, about the vibrant lives of five women with disabilities on their journey to the 2010 Ms. Wheelchair America pageant. With the uplifting message that pageantry is “more than just a sash and crown,” the concept of beauty is defined through the lens of advocacy and perseverance. For more information, visit <http://definingbeautydoc.blogspot.com>.

About the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) at Syracuse University

BBI reaches around the globe in its efforts to advance the civic, economic, and social participation of people with disabilities. BBI’s Atlanta office serves people of all ages and disabilities across eight southeastern states and offers programs including career coaching, job shadowing, summer internships for youths with disabilities, and public awareness campaigns. Officially launched in 2005, BBI builds on the legacy of Burton Blatt, former dean of SU’s School of Education and a pioneering disability rights scholar, to better the lives of people with disabilities. With a staff of more than 60, BBI has offices in Syracuse, N.Y., Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Ga., New York, N.Y., and Tel Aviv, Israel. For more information, visit <http://bbi.syr.edu>.

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