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Big Brothers Big Sisters of Coastal & Northern New Jersey Honors Bigs and Littles of the Year

ASBURY PARK, NJ — Big Brothers Big Sisters of Coastal & Northern New Jersey (BBBSCNNJ) has named Ernest Ebanks of Mount Olive Township and his Little Brother Dreveon as Community Based Big Brother and Little Brother of the Year, and Stephanie DeFeo of Old Bridge and her Little Sister Jasmine as Community Based Big Sister and Little Sister of the Year.

"We are inspired by Ernest and Stephanie's dedication to the BBBSCNNJ program, commitment to their matches, and the incredible impact they have had on the lives of their Littles," said stated William Salcedo, Executive Director. "Ernest and Stephanie are true role models, the epitome of what mentors can and should be, and excellent ambassadors for Big Brothers Big Sisters."

Ernest and his Little Brother Dreveon were matched in March of 2016, and in addition to being named BBBSCNNJ's Big Brother and Little Brother of the Year, they are also being honored statewide as the NJ Big Brother and Little Brother of the Year. Dreveon was without a consistent male figure in his life and going through the process of being in a new school in a new town. A friendship built on his and Ernest's common interest and love for sports blossomed into a wonderful mentorship. Frequently attending and watching football games and simply spending one on one time together has grown this match into what Dreveon, Ernest, and Dreveon's mother call "family." Ernest ignited a fire in Dreveon by encouraging him with academics & building his self-esteem. Once stating that he felt he would not be able to achieve going to college, Dreveon has now started to look at colleges he would like to attend in the future. Both Dreveon and his mother have expressed that Ernest is one of the main reasons why Dreveon is more confident in himself and has followed along a positive path. Dreveon has shared that due to his positive experience in the Big Brothers Big Sisters Program with Ernest, he plans on being a Big one day himself to mentor a child in need!

"Dreveon has impacted me in many ways," said Ernest. "I feel a sense of accomplishment for being a positive role model for a young child when he needed someone the most. Dreveon has been a real blessing in my life and a wonderful addition to my family."

Stephanie and her Little Sister Jasmine were matched when Jasmine was 6-years-old, and they just celebrated their 11-year match anniversary last month! Throughout this time, Stephanie has been a constant support to Jasmine. She was there to offer guidance and support as Jasmine was transitioning into high school, starting her first job, taking her driver's test, and now as she prepares for her future beyond high school. Jasmine has expressed to their case manager on many occasions how grateful she is that Stephanie is always there for her. Jasmine's mother has shared that Jasmine is more open with Stephanie than anyone and credits her for helping Jasmine step out of her comfort zone by encouraging her to try new things. From going on hikes, grabbing lunch, and trying photo-worthy milkshakes, to seeing concerts, plays, and ballets together, they've created many memories over the last 11 years. Some of these outings have even become annual traditions, such as going back to school shopping at the end of each summer and attending our agency's holiday parties. Although they will be graduating out of our program soon, Stephanie, Jasmine, and Jasmine's mother have all expressed that this friendship is one that will last a lifetime. Stephanie even recently reassured Jasmine, "You have me for life!"

"I have been a Big to Jasmine for 11 amazing years and have watched her learn and grow into a beautiful butterfly," said Stephanie. "I have been able to provide guidance, build a wonderful relationship, and share experiences. Through these experiences, I have been able to learn and grow myself, and I have BBSCNNJ to thank. Maya Angelou once said, 'We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.'"

BBSCNNJ's mission is more critical than ever as the agency continues to serve 1,350 children with one-to-one mentoring throughout 10 counties in New Jersey. From emotional support to the joy of having a trusted friend in their corner, Bigs provide the stability that Littles need to achieve their full potential.

To learn more about BBSCNNJ, apply to become a Big, or make a donation, visit mentornj.org and follow the agency on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

About BBSCNNJ:

For the past 45 years, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Coastal & Northern New Jersey has been making a positive difference in the lives of at-risk children through professionally supported, one-to-one mentoring relationships with adult volunteers. BBSCNNJ empowers children to achieve their highest potential as they grow to become confident, competent, and caring individuals. For more information on becoming a Big Brother or Big Sister or to make a donation, visit: www.mentornj.org