

AMERICA AWARD CEREMONY

MEDAL RECIPIENTS

Diedré Blake

Diedré M. Blake was born in Jamaica, where she lived until the age of fourteen. Her last five years in Jamaica were spent living in St. Francis Convent, where she developed a passion for music, literature, spirituality and art. Diedré earned an A.B. in Studio Art from Stanford University in 2000 with a specialization in painting and printmaking; and an M.A. in Expressive Therapies with a specialization in Art Therapy from Lesley University in 2006.

After working in the area of counseling, in 2011 Diedré began studying at John Cabot University for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Italian Studies with a minor in Creative Writing. She has a very strong interest in both Italian language and culture. She has worn many hats throughout her life, from teaching computer programming to personal training, from being an expressive therapist to knitwear designer. Regardless of where she is or what she is doing, Diedré's purpose has always remained the same: to help where she can, how she can.

Neal Huddon-Cossar

Neal Huddon-Cossar was born and raised in San Francisco, California, but has been living in Rome, Italy, for the past three years. He is currently a senior at John Cabot University, where he is pursuing his Bachelor of Arts degree in International Affairs with a Minor in Economics. Before attending JCU, he spent eight months studying Italian language and culture at the Università Per Stranieri di Perugia. He now speaks Italian at an advanced level, holding the *Certificazione di Italiano come Lingua Straniera* (CILS) Due title.

At John Cabot University, Neal is a prominent member of the university's Model United Nations Society where he helped organize and chair the JCU's own Model United Nations for Italian high school students. Neal is also the cofounder and current president of Grassroots, the university's environmental club. The club also organizes "clean-up days" in Trastevere (Rome), a volunteer activity in which students pick up garbage along the streets of the historic neighborhood. Finally, Neal also helped with the management of the student-led English conversation lessons at the Casa Internazionale delle Donne.

Neal completed two internships in Rome. The first was with Gruppo 183, an Italian environmental NGO for the protection of soil and water resources. During his time with Gruppo 183, he organized and launched a national photography contest promoting the ecosystem services of Italian lakes and waterways. The second internship was within the Environment, Science, Technology, and Health Section of the United States Mission to Italy. While at the Embassy, he proposed and implemented an "#EarthDayinItalia" social media campaign.

After graduating from John Cabot University, Neal plans to pursue a master's degree in sustainable development or climate change and energy policy. Environmental sustainability is his main passion and he hopes to build a successful career promoting its realization worldwide.

Challis Popkey

Challis Popkey was born and raised in Boise, Idaho. She attended The University of Oregon in Eugene from 2010 to 2012, where she worked as a sports reporter and anchor for the student-produced television program "Duck TV." It was here she found her love of storytelling and video production.

In 2012 she moved to Italy for a year to pursue her study of Italian language. For three months she worked in Tuscany harvesting grapes, and then moved to Ferrara to study. Attending courses taught completely in Italian helped her achieve fluency and discover her second great passion: Italian culture.

In September 2013 she returned to the states for an internship at WNET, Manhattan's PBS affiliate. Here she performed the duties of Assistant Producer for the hour long documentary feature *Treasures of New York: Stanford White*.

After the internship, she moved back to Italy to finish her Bachelor of Arts degree at John Cabot University in Rome. She is studying Communications with a minor in Italian Studies. Her goal is to work in the broadcast media field, combining her passions for video production, storytelling and Italian culture.