



Perris Press Release

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Perris Honors Five High School "Students of the Year"

The five scholars who earned the title of Student of the Year at their individual high schools in the Perris Valley shared several common traits—humility, compassion, quiet leadership and a willingness to work without seeking credit.

But in a ceremony this week, the graduating seniors took front and center as they were awarded scholarships, medals, certificates and other mementos for their commitment to academics and community service.

Receiving the accolades were Ryane Fennema, Heritage High School; Christina Estrada, Perris High School; Kiyhanna Gipson, California Military Institute; Mischel Martinez, Perris Lake High School and Michelle Smith, Paloma Valley High School.

"These students are a great group of people who will go very far in life and do much for their



Richard Wallis, principal of the California Military Institute, places the Student of the Year achievement medal, on Kiyhanna Gipson.

community," said Perris Mayor Daryl Busch, who led a contingent of City representatives attending the annual Student of the Year celebration. "Every year you get to hear their stories and you realize what a special group of young people they are. Seeing their achievement is heartwarming."

Other City representatives at Thursday's 14th Annual Student of the Year Scholarship and Recognition ceremony included Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough, City Clerk Judy Haughney, Administrative Services Manager Isabel Carlos and Ted Norton, CEO of the Perris Valley Chamber of Commerce. Barry Busch represented Perris resident and Riverside County Supervisor Marian Ashley, who could not attend.

Yarbrough said the students inspire him.

"You make us all proud," Yarbrough said. "It's great to recognize students for their achievements and for making things happen. Kids like these are our future."

The Perris Valley Chamber of Commerce and the Menifee Valley Chamber of Commerce sponsored Thursday evening's ceremony at the Sizzler restaurant in Lake Elsinore. Each student received \$2,460 in scholarship awards. Representatives from several California legislators presented the students with plaques and certificates. Jonathan Greenberg, superintendent of the Perris Union High School District, presented the winners with a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition from U.S. Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Vista.

"People like you are going to continue to make the U.S. the greatest country in the world," Greenberg said.

Here are brief biographies of the five Students of the Year for 2012:

Ryane Fennema, 18, of Nuevo, plans to study kinesiology at Cal State San Marcos with the eventual goal of becoming a physical therapist or sports trainer. Heritage High School principal Julie Zierold said Fennema is "quiet in nature" and "conducts herself with great character."

Fennema played varsity tennis and softball at Heritage. She also volunteered at the snack bar, organized softball tournaments and helped tape the ankles and wrists of football players before games. Last year, she wrote letters to all the seniors on the tennis team, even those who never got into a match. One tennis player was so grateful to receive acknowledgement that she broke down in tears.

"I think it is important to show people that caring about others is so important," Fennema said. "A simple smile when you're having a bad day brightens your day."

She said receiving the Student of the Year award is "absolutely amazing and a real honor."

Christina Estrada, 18, of Perris, plans to attend UCLA and study mathematics with a future goal of perhaps becoming a college instructor. She said she is grateful for being named Student of the Year for Perris High School and thanked the two chambers of commerce and the Lake Elsinore Sizzler for organizing the ceremony.

"There are a lot of students at my school who could have received this award," she said. "I am so grateful. I try to stay humble and quietly help people."

Estrada worked as a set-builder on the Perris High School production of "The Wizard of Oz" and assisted at the back-to-school jamboree in the fall. She also tends to her infirmed grandmother's four dogs and turtle on the weekends.

Perris High School principal Lynn Sheffield said Estrada displays quiet leadership that makes things happen.

"She makes the right decisions and knows what to do," Sheffield said.

Kiyhanna Gipson, 17, of Perris, plans on attending the University of Arizona to study medicine with the eventual goal of becoming a pediatrician. She said she will make good use of the scholarship money because family finances are tight.

"I really need the help paying for the university," Gipson said. "I'm very grateful."

Gipson played basketball on the California Military Institute squad, served as a cheerleader and assisted in other sporting events.

Richard Wallis, CMI principal, said Gipson's intensity in the classroom and basketball court make people notice. "She's not the tallest player but she's got the greatest fire in her eyes and the greatest spirit," Wallis said. "She's quiet but everyone knows she's there. She never does less than her best."

Mischel Martinez, 17, of Menifee, plans to attend Mount San Jacinto College before transferring to the new UCR medical school where she will study medicine with plans to become an anesthesiologist. Martinez struggled in high school before transferring to Perris Lake High, a continuation campus. There she blossomed.

She became president of the student body and earned 90 units in a single year. Away from school, Martinez volunteers for Sovereign Grace Community Church west of Perris, helping lead Bible study classes and taking part in bake sales and garage sales to raise money for church ministries.

"I am excited and honored by this award and I am ready to start my career," she said.

Perris Lake High School principal Narciso Iglesias called Martinez a "very great leader" among her peers.

"She personifies quiet grace," he said. "She is a very grateful person."

Michelle Smith, 17, of Menifee, will be enrolling in UCR to study biochemistry with the eventual goal of becoming a pediatrician specializing in treating hearing-impaired children.

"I love children and have been fascinated with human anatomy since I was a little kid," Smith said. "I am grateful to my teachers, principal, parents and family. I am very honored to be here."

Smith learned American Sign Language at Paloma Valley High School and uses the skill to interpret the Mass to the deaf at St. Marta's Catholic Church in Murrieta. She also volunteers at the new Loma Linda Hospital in Murrieta.

Paloma Valley principal Brian Morris called Smith "the whole package—" a student who sports an A-plus grade point average, has been accepted to college and contributes plenty of community service.

"She is a super nice person," Morris said. "She is nice from start to finish. It has been my privilege to have her on our campus."



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch stands at attention during the playing of the National Anthem at the 14th Annual Student of the Year Scholarship and Recognition ceremony.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and City Councilman Mark Yarbrough prepare to present a Certificate of Achievement to the scholarship winners.



The scholarship recipients: Mischel Martinez, Lake Perris High School; Kiyhanna Gipson, California Military Institute; Christina Estrada, Perris High School; Ryane Fennema, Heritage High School and Michelle Smith, Paloma Valley High School.



A close-up of the Student of the Year medal presented to honorees.