



Perris Press Release

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Five Selected as "Students of the Year"

For years, they worked tirelessly in the classroom, took on extra-curricular activities like playing in the band, performed community service work like helping the homeless or overcame obstacles that would have defeated less diligent students.

For their talent and tenacity, five Perris Valley high-school seniors recently were selected as Students of the Year by the Perris Valley and Menifee Valley Chambers of Commerce.

The five—Alyssa Twyman of Paloma Valley High School, Janelle Sauls of Heritage High School, Sara Haro of Choice 2000 On-Line School, Sally Rico of Perris High School and Rafael Rodriguez of Perris Lake High School—received scholarships of \$2,160 apiece and the accolades of school administrators and elected officials.

"Graduating high school is a milestone in the life of every student," said Perris Mayor Daryl Busch. "We want to help them get off on the right step. We appreciate everything they've done and we especially want to congratulate their parents. I am proud of these students and of our community."

Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough presented engraved pens to the students, which contain their names, schools and are designed in the students' school colors.

"It's students like these who give us hope for the future," Yarbrough said. "In a world where everything seems so negative, they serve as examples to be celebrated and saluted."

Some of the students were classic success stories. Twyman, for instance, was class valedictorian and played flute in the school band at Paloma Valley. She also helped organize blood drives at the campus. She is attending college at UC San Diego and will major in structural engineering.

In accepting the scholarship, Twyman said she hoped that "I was a good role model, a good example."

Sauls will attend Azusa Pacific University and plans to major in biology. She hopes one day to become a pediatrician. Described by her Heritage High School teachers as one of the hardest-working students around, someone "willing to do whatever it takes," Sauls also plans to play basketball in college.

Rico, who graduated from Perris High School, is a triplet. She worked on the school yearbook staff and dance team. She said of herself: "My passion is music. I love to sing and dance." Rico will attend UCR and plans to study humanities. Along with her sisters, she will be the first of her family to attend a four-year university.

Haro and Rodriguez took a different path to success. Both said they were indifferent students and cared little about graduating high school, or even attending classes, until they enrolled in alternate schools.

Haro excelled at Choice 2000 Online Charter School, while Rodriguez earned academic excellence at Perris Lake High School, a continuation campus.

Haro had already dropped out when she re-enrolled in Choice 2000 and turned herself around academically. Her teachers recognized the change as well, calling her someone who is "hard-working and driven and always does her best. She plans to pursue a career in writing and photography in college.

Rodriguez went from a 0.0 to a 4.0 (straight-A) grade-point average at Perris Lake High School. School principal Penny Graham said Rodriguez "exemplifies what we're all about" at the campus. He took the opportunity to transform himself from a student who seldom went to school to someone who became a role model, mentor and manager of every sports team on campus.

Graham said teachers were skeptical when Rodriguez announced one day that they would see a different person on campus. But Rodriguez proved true to his word.

"He's got goals, he's got plans, he's going place," she said.

Rodriguez said he plans on enlisting in the Marine Corps.

Sally Myers, who founded the Student of the Year Scholarship and Recognition Dinner in 1998, said the program requires all applicants to write two essays and obtain two letters of recommendation from peers and teachers. Essays and letters require the applicants to explain how they have made a difference in the schools and communities.

Jonathan Greenberg, superintendent of the Perris Union High School District, said this year's scholarship recipients took advantage of the opportunities granted them to earn academic and civic accolades.

"You live in a country where it doesn't matter if you are poor or rich or if you struggled to achieve success," he said. "If you decide what you want to be to can be what you want to be."



Student of the Year honorees: Alyssa Twyman, Paloma Valley High School; Sara Haro, Choice 2000 On-Line School; Janelle Sauls, Heritage High School; Rafael Rorriguez, Perris Lake High School and Sally Rico, Perris High School. Perris City officials are standing behind them.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch offers his congratulations to a Student of Distinction.



Ted Norton of the Perris Valley Chamber of Commerce offers his congratulations to Alyssa Twyman.



Future Marine Rafael Rodriguez offers a thumbs-up at the ceremony.



Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough was interviewed on camera about the event.