



home > city hall > press releases

## Perris Students of the Year Reap Rewards for Hard Work

Smart but sensitive, motivated but mindful of their peers, college-bound but compassionate toward the less fortunate.

Those were some of the attributes describing the Perris Union High School District's five "Students of the Year" who were honored May 26 during an awards ceremony at the Lake Elsinore Diamond. The students received scholarships of \$2,220 each for college or university studies, as well as numerous personalized mementos and practical items—such as towels, coffee mugs and laundry baskets—that will come in handy when they go off to school.

The Student of the Year program culminates the district's Student of the Month honors, which was founded by Sally Myers of Sizzler Restaurants, including one in Perris. The Student of the Year honorees previously had been honored at a monthly awards program.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch represented the City at the event. He came away impressed.

"You can't say enough good words to describe what these young people have accomplished," Busch said. "It makes you proud of our City and our schools. It is an honor to support a program such as Student of the Year."

City Councilman Mark Yarbrough, who purchased ink pens with the school colors of each winning student, could not attend because he attended his grandson's graduation. But he texted his best regards.

"All of my congratulations to the students!" he wrote.

School superintendent Jonathan Greenberg noted that all the winning scholars completed rigorous academic schedules loaded with honors and advanced placement course, all while finding time to volunteer hundreds of hours to worthwhile causes.

"It amazes me the balance you have in your lives," Greenberg told the scholars. "You have displayed a love of learning, character, time management and perseverance. You are part of an elite group. You have made a difference at a time when it was important to make a difference."



The 2016 Perris Union High School District Students of the Year: Reyna Nevarez, Perris High School; Desiree Washington, Heritage High School; Brittany Maldonado, Perris Lake High School; and Crystal Chhan, Paloma Valley High School.

Here are brief biographies of the winning Students of the Year:

### Reyna Sonia Nevarez; Perris High School:

Reyna, 18, will be attending UC Santa Barbara to study psychology. Eventually she would like to form her own practice, helping people understand their own emotions and achieve happiness and balance in their own lives.

"I really enjoy helping people," she said. "Knowing you played a part in making someone happy is a great feeling."

Reyna grew up in a single-parent home, one of five children. Her mom, Catalina Lopez, "is definitely my hero." While at Perris High School, Reyna achieved a 4.0-grade point average while completing four advance-placement classes this year. In addition, Reyna is president of the "Friday Night Live" Club. The club produced a series of videos entitled "If You Knew My Story," which highlighted students facing major challenges—including sexual abuse and parents in prison—while attending high school.

"It made me appreciate my family—I am lucky," Reyna said.

She also captained the Panthers volleyball team and kept statistics for the boys' team.

Her favorite subject is English and she enjoys writing. Reyna said she has already put her scholarship funds to good use.

"I will use it to buy a computer," she said.

### Desiree Salamasina Washington; Heritage High School:

Desiree, 17, overcame profound hearing loss as a youngster to achieve great success at Heritage. She was born with medical issues that, over time, have gradually robbed her of most of her hearing, although she can distinguish some sounds and reads lips.

But don't pity her.

"I never want to use my disability as an excuse to fail," Desiree says.

She will enroll at UC San Diego in the fall with plans to study communications, a course of study she hopes launches a career as a disability advocate. She hopes to tell the stories of disabled people who succeed through public speaking and movies she produces.

Principal Frank Arce called Desiree "an inspiration to myself and others" and a woman who "always demands that she be given the opportunity to succeed."

Desiree maintained a straight A-average this year while completing advanced placement courses in literature, government, macro-economics, calculus and biology. She volunteers painting homes for Habitat for Humanity, helps feed the homeless and assists in the school's "Teens for Jeans," which distributes blue jeans to homeless high-school students.

In her spare time, Desiree enjoys painting landscapes and reading novels by her favorite author, John Green.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch congratulates the Students of the Year during the May 26 awards ceremony at the Lake Elsinore Diamond.

### Brittany Nicole Maldonado; Perris Lake High School:

Brittany, 18, didn't get into gear with her high-school career until October, 2015. Once she did, she ran in overdrive. She caught up on all her delinquent courses, flew through her senior year coursework and amassed enough credits to graduate early.

She plans to pursue an a career in business management, first by completing the basics at Moreno Valley College before transferring to a four-year school.

Brittany said her turnaround resulted from a simple conclusion: "I realized I could not reach my full potential until I put a total effort into it."

Dean Hauser, principal of Perris Lake High School, the district's continuation campus, said Brittany is a perfect example of a student who took advantage of a second chance to shine. She became active in the school's student government and "is on the go all the time." Brittany also volunteers at St. James Catholic School in Perris.

Brittany said she enjoys reading novels and biographies in her spare time, along with short stories from horror master Edgar Allen Poe. Of her award, she said: "I was really shocked. I really appreciate what the City of Perris does for the community. Events like this really help students."

### Crystal Belle Chhan; Paloma Valley High School

The daughter of Cambodian refugees, Crystal commands such respect from her teachers that on the rare occasion that she answers a test question incorrectly, they are compelled to double-check the answer key to make sure it is right. Principal Don Williamson said Crystal easily is one of the top academic students he's seen in decades of education.

Yet peers and teachers speaking of Crystal use words like "always humble, kind and wanting to share her knowledge to make the world a better place."

Crystal played on the varsity basketball team and served on the school's Key Club, which organized food drives for the homeless. She maintained a 5.0 grade-point average with a course load that included college-level physics and English and advanced-placement biology, calculus, government/economics, Spanish and psychology.

I am honored to receive this award," Crystal said. "There were a lot of other very qualified candidates. I am proud of the impact I made at my school. I do it because it makes me feel good but it's nice to be recognized."

Crystal will attend UC San Diego where she plans to study biochemistry with an eye on becoming an immunologist or pathologist.

The California Military Institute student of the year was Viviana Esquivel Perez, who was unable to attend because of a previous commitment.

### Media Contact

Joe Vargo  
Public Information Officer  
951-943-6100  
[jvargo@cityofperris.org](mailto:jvargo@cityofperris.org)



Perris City Hall  
101 N. D Street  
Perris, CA 92570

Hours: Mon. - Fri. 8 am - 6pm

Phone: (951) 943-6100  
[Map to City Hall](#) • [Contact Us](#)

Get our mobile apps:  
[Apple](#) • [Android](#)

### Contact Perris

Call: (951) 943-6100 (available 24 hours/day)

Report a Problem/Ask a Question:

Contact Form

Follow us: [f](#) [t](#) [i](#) [v](#) [@](#)

### In this website

- [City Hall](#)
- [Government](#)
- [Residents](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Visitors](#)

Translate this site:  
[Select Language](#)