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Ceremony Honors High School Winners

The City of Perris celebrated the success of five local high-school graduates who plan on changing the world through engineering, science, technology, teaching and comedy.

The event was the annual Perris Union High School District's Student of the Year ceremony, honoring the winners from Perris Union High School, the California Military Institute, Paloma Valley High School, Perris High School and Heritage High School.

The event, held at the Lake Elsinore Diamond, is hosted by the Perris Valley Chamber of Commerce and Menifee Valley Chamber of Commerce. "Today you have reached the end of your high school years,"

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch told the students and their families. "Tomorrow you start a new chapter in your lives. We are so proud of you. We know you will accomplish your goals."

Teachers, principals and school district superintendent Jonathan Greenberg said the five students share common traits: humility, determination, commitment, discipline and a desire to serve and not be served.

The winning students include immigrants, life-long Perris residents and one who arrived a few years ago from Los Angeles. All will continue their careers in college.



The 2015 Students of the Year who were honored by the Perris Valley and Menifee Valley Chambers of Commerce: Lesley Guadalupe Ayala (Perris High School); Julia Isabel Rivera (Paloma Valley High School); Miguel Angel Lopez (California Military Institute); Erika Shiokawa (Perris Lake High School) and Holly Woods (Heritage High School.)

The 2015 Perris Valley/Menifee Valley Chambers of Commerce Students of the Year are:

- Erika Shiokawa, 17, Perris Lake High School**

Erika emigrated to Perris from Japan following the devastating 2011 earthquake that crippled the Fukushima nuclear power plant. She arrived two years ago and could not speak a word of English. Her favorite subject was math.

"I didn't need to know the language to do well," she said.

Despite that obstacle, Erika thrived in Perris, displaying a positive attitude, prompting her school principal to comment that he never saw her without a smile on her face. She finished her career at Perris Lake High School with a solid B+ average. She graduated early.

Erika will study nursing at the Riverside Community College District and hopes to eventually follow her mother, Lorie, who is studying to become a pharmacist.

"I will do my best to live up to the trust you have placed in me," Erika said during her remarks at the awards ceremony.

In her spare time, Erika enjoys playing classical music on the piano.

- Miguel Angel Lopez, 17, California Military Institute**

Miguel will attend the University of California, Irvine, and study English with the goal of becoming a teacher and working in a disadvantaged community. He credits his years at CMI with helping transform him from a shy kid to a gregarious young man who has risen through the ranks to become commander of the 9th Brigade and 9th Regiment of the California Cadet Corps while mentoring younger students.

"I would not have wanted to be at any other high school," Miguel said. "CMI taught me the value of service."

That service has included feeding homeless veterans, traveling to 29 Palms to present Christmas presents to the children of Marines deployed overseas, taking part in Civil War re-enactments at the Orange Empire Railway Museum and volunteering at the annual Fun Run.

Miguel graduated with a 4.15-grade point average. In his spare time, he plays jazz, blues and rock-and-roll on his guitar.

- Julia Isabel Rivera, 17, Paloma Valley High School**

A native of the Philippines, Julia and her family emigrated to the U.S. when she was four. She will attend the University of California, Berkeley, to study engineering, with the goal to become an environmental engineer and address the challenges of pollution and climate change.

"It's an honor being chosen as the Student of the Year," she said. "All of my colleagues work hard. This award means a lot."

Julia's favorite classes at Paloma included advanced placement calculus and physics. She graduated with a 4.44-grade point average. In March, Julias received a surprise visit from the television station MTV, which presented her with a \$20,000 check to help cover her first year of college expenses. The video is on YouTube.

Julia volunteers feeding the homeless at Mary's Kitchen in San Bernardino and mentors elementary school children in several subjects. She also is an accomplished martial artist, studying jujitsu, Muay Thai and kickboxing. She hopes one day to become a mix-martial artist.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch shakes hands with Holly Woods during the May 27th Student of the Year celebration.

- Lesley Guadalupe Ayala, 18, Perris High School**

Lesley also is quite an accomplished martial artist, holding a black belt in tae kwon do. She will be attending the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., where she plans to study aerospace engineering and serve aboard a nuclear submarine.

Lesley came to the City from a high-crime area of Los Angeles six years ago. She loves Perris because she can walk and ride her bicycle and feel safe.

"To be able to ride my bike to City parks is a joy," Lesley said.

A day before receiving the Student-of-the-Year honor, Lesley was chosen as PHS class valedictorian and graduated with a 4.38-grade-point average. Her favorite class: statistics.

She will leave for Maryland at the end of June with a combination of excitement and nerves.

"If you want to be an engineer, the military is on the cutting edge of technology and the Navy is the most technologically savvy," Lesley said.

Lesley was a member the high-school swim team and Junior ROTC. She coached AYSO soccer for the City in her spare time.

- Holly Woods, 17, Heritage High School**

Holly will attend UCI to study mathematics with a goal of returning to Perris to teach at her alma mater.

"I love math," she says. "I want to pass that love on."

With her upbeat and contagious personality, Holly's teachers and school administrators say she reminds them of former Saturday Night Live star Molly Shannon, a comparison Holly doesn't mind. One of her extra-curricular activities at Heritage was "Friday Night Live," an anti-drug effort put on by students and staff. She also has appeared in several school theatre productions, including "Pride and Prejudice," "Almost Maine" and "Stage Door."

She said she is "super-proud" to represent her school as Student of the Year.

"It's an amazing experience," said Holly, who graduated with a 3.9-grade point average. "I still feel it's not real."

Holly volunteers at Soles for Souls, providing shoes for the underprivileged, serves as a peer tutor and teaches Vacation Bible School at her church. She said she loves the City of Perris and over the years has taken part in the Breakfast With Santa, the Tree Lighting Ceremony and National Night Out.

"I find it beautiful," she said. "I've always loved the sense of community."

Media Contact

Joe Vargo
Public Information Officer
951-956-2120
jvargo@cityofperris.org



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

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