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## Palmetto High PTSA sweeps county awards

BY ANN MCMASTER

**P**almetto Senior High School's Parent Teacher Student Association recently was recognized as the district leader in three categories, with an additional award for the number of male members.

The Palmetto wins at the 2015 PTA/PTSA Miami-Dade Council award banquet represented the most wins of any chapter. Palmetto won the Program of Impact Award, the Environmental Award, PTSA Leader of Tomorrow and Supermen of the PTA, which recognizes chapters with over 100 male members.

"It's great to be recognized," said Anna Hochkammer, president of the Palmetto High School PTSA. "But the real reward is the positive difference we make to the school, our community and to individual student's lives."

Hochkammer said the PTSA invested more than \$100,000 in Palmetto High School over the last 12 months.

"We funded some very nice extras," she said. "We paid for everything, from capital improvements — including a dedicated computer lab and 50 computers, new sound equipment for the auditorium, updated TV production hardware and software — and things you would assume your tax dollars paid for, like musical instruments, sheet music and extra sets of books for the classrooms so kids can leave heavy texts at home."

Strong fundraising and dedicated volunteers make these things possible, Hochkammer said, and the PTSA is the vehicle that provides a structure and needed financial support for school projects and improvements that would not be possible without outside support.

The Environmental Award recognized PTSA support of Palmetto's strong Environmental and Science Masters Academy and its solar power and engineering students. The five-student Palmetto Planeteers team envisioned developing a solar charging station for the school's electric carts used by security guards, but needed funding for the solar panels. The PTSA, with the Class of 1984, donated \$2,100 so the team



Palmetto High senior Sophia Paredes and PTSA President Anna Hochkammer display awards they won in the annual competition.

could purchase the necessary pieces.

The solar charging station, which reduced school energy consumption, won recognition for the students as one of the nation's top 16 high schools in the National Lexus Eco Challenge, a STEM contest for practical solutions to environmental issues. The team was awarded a \$10,000 prize that was split between the science department and the students. The students also wrote a "How To" booklet slated to be distributed in seven high schools located in cities that are part of the Green Corridor.

Palmetto High School senior and Student Council senator Sophia Paredes was recognized as a PTSA Leader of Tomorrow. Paredes contributed a perspective on student issues and the use of social media, wrote, filmed and edited a video greeting and arranged for Student Council members to represent the PTSA during Open House. Paredes also helped organize and staff spring and fall donor appreciation events.

Palmetto PTSA's Paws for Panthers was selected as the county's top Program of

Impact. PTSA volunteer and board member Mercedes Sorensen worked with the school social worker to develop a way to help students facing serious financial hardship while preserving their privacy and the confidentiality of their individual circumstances.

"The goal is to keep these children in school, encourage their graduation and allow them to have the same high school experiences as their peers," said Sorensen. Paws for Panthers seeks cash donations and merchandise to help with everything — clothing, books, school supplies and school fees — even extra-curricular activities that make up the high school experience (field trips, graduation expenses, homecoming and prom). Paws for Panthers has received \$4,000 in cash donations and in-kind donations valued at over \$3,000.

"We have maybe 20-25 percent of parents participating in the PTSA," said Sorensen. "Imagine what we could do if everyone helped a little. It all adds up and 100 percent of whatever you give goes directly to benefit your child's school."