

COMMUNITY

Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Redlands-Riverside honor Youth of the Year



Adrian Michael Johnson, Jr. Courtesy photo

By **Kristina Hernandez**, *Redlands Daily Facts*

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MORENO VALLEY -- The Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Redlands-Riverside recognized its Youth of the Year and Youth of the Year Ambassadors during its Be Great Awards ceremony Friday.

Held at the Moreno Valley Conference & Recreation Center in Moreno Valley, the awards look to introduce the Boys & Girls Clubs community to the members it supports.

“The Youth of the Year program is the highest achievement you can be a part of in the Boys and Girls Club,” said Eddie Hernandez, the club’s development director of special events, by phone. “Any club kid builds up for that moment; they dream of it. For these kids who are selected, ... this is something they’ll remember their whole life.”

Moreno Valley resident Adrian Michael Johnson Jr., a 17-year-old Rancho Verde High School senior, is the club’s Youth of the Year, having earned the title for his story of achieving academic success following a rough childhood, said the nonprofit in a news release.

After joining the club’s Casitas Del Valle clubhouse, Adrian had a change of heart and began excelling in his academic studies under the influence of club staff and family members, Hernandez said.

A panel of judges selected Adrian from a pool of nominees because his story resonated with the group, he said.

“He went from failing school miserably to getting A’s and B’s. I think that spoke to the judges,” Hernandez said. “He now has a passion for service. ... And after college wants to go back into the Moreno Valley community and start a theater program for youth. He has a really inspiring story and is an outstanding kid all together.”

The club’s Youth of the Year Ambassadors — Adrian Raquel Chavez, a 16-year-old Redlands East Valley High School junior; Isabel Cruz, a 16-year-old Citrus Valley High School junior; Karla Ponce, a 17-year-old Orangewood High School senior; Destiny and Stephanie Puente, 16-year-old juniors at REV; and Diego Soto, an 18-year-old Redlands High School senior — are all members of the Hansberger Clubhouse in Redlands.

The panel selected all members for the honor based on their “character and citizenship, academics and commitment to a healthy lifestyle,” according to a news release.

“The Be Great Awards (brought) together our ‘best of the best’ youth and advocates at a great venue,” said P.T. McEwen, Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Redlands-Riverside’s chief executive officer, in the release. “We are proud to honor our Youth of the Year and partners from the Inland Empire that support our mission of providing great futures for kids.”

Highlights of Friday’s events included the naming of the club’s Be Great Impact and Be Great Mission awards. Starbucks and Bank of America received the honors, respectively.

Tony Shin, KNBC Channel 4’s Inland Empire bureau chief, hosted.

To learn more, go to www.begreatie.org or call 888-822-6535.