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Mom always said cleaning up would pay off some day
Local school custodian earns national public health award
by making learning about public health contagious for students

ANNISTON, Ala.—Principals always say no running in the hallways, but the head custodian at Saks Elementary School is trying something new; she is teaching in the hallways. Briana Rivera uses innovative solutions to involve students in maintaining clean surroundings, teaching them responsibility and instilling a sense of pride in their own school.

Due to her outstanding leadership, Rivera is a runner-up recipient of the national C.L.E.A.N.® Award. This honor includes a cash award of \$2,000, an all expense paid trip to the National Education Association (NEA) National ESP Conference to receive the award, and a one-year NEA membership.

“As custodians we are responsible for not only keeping the school looking good but also keeping it sanitized,” said Briana Rivera. “By sanitizing things that constantly come in contact with little hands, we are able to slow the spread of germs, thereby keeping the students in school rather than at home with colds.”

Rivera teaches by example and motivates the students to take responsibility for their surroundings as well. She carries stickers and small awards with her during the day to hand out to students who stop to pick up trash or remember to wash their hands. Every month she presents a “clean classroom certificate” to the teacher and students who kept their classroom the neatest.

“NEA is proud to be a partner with the Soap and Detergent Association and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in presenting the 2009 C.L.E.A.N.® Awards! Custodians are critical partners in creating healthy, clean and safe schools for our students. They take so much pride in their work and know that what they do every day fosters an environment where students can learn more effectively,” said NEA President Dennis Van Roekel. “While the students and teachers are in class, in addition to their regular duties, custodians are the eyes and ears of the schools. They know who belongs in the school and who doesn’t, helping create a safe environment so students can learn and teachers can teach. Our schools could not function without our custodians.”

(more)



Rivera's personal touch has paid off, as competition for the cleanest classroom becomes a real contest. She said that all the classrooms want to win and have their name announced over the student-produced morning TV announcements at school.

In addition to ensuring a clean school, Rivera believes her job entails serving as educator. She consults with other staff and the county custodial supervisor about best practices to keep the school clean and sanitized. During orientation for new teachers, Rivera is the first to address them about school sanitization policies. She assists with the school recycling program and encourages others to get onboard.

"Custodians work diligently every day to keep our schools clean, which is essential to the health of students, teachers and school personnel," said Nancy Bock, SDA Vice President of Education. "These awards recognize the unsung but crucial role custodians play on a daily basis in schools across the nation."

From school principal Hector Baeza to the teachers and education support personnel, the praise for Rivera is unanimous. They agree that her job performance is outstanding, and her smile is infectious.

The school's motto is: "One Team, One Goal." Rivera works proudly each day to live up to those words.

The national C.L.E.A.N.® Award recognizes the contributions that custodians make to public health in their schools, communities and their profession. The award demonstrates outstanding leadership to school cleanliness and reflects the contributions that education support professionals (ESPs) can make to public health. The award program is a joint initiative of the National Education Association (NEA), the NEA Health Information Network (NEA HIN), the Soap and Detergent Association (SDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This is the first year for the award. Up to five awards will be presented annually: one top recipient and four runners-up.

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