

Palm Springs foundation awards \$40K scholarships

By Joan L. Boiko Special to The Desert Sun

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The Foundation for the Palm Springs Unified School District awarded two Desert Hot Springs High School seniors with \$40,000 scholarships last week. This is the second year the foundation has awarded two \$10,000 per year (for up to four years) scholarships from a major grant made to the foundation from the estate of a longtime Palm Springs resident.



Ellen Goodman, executive director of the Foundation for the Palm Springs Unified School District (right), congratulates scholarship winners Betsy Sanchez-Briones and Henoc Benavides. *Submitted*

Foundation Executive Director Ellen Goodman presented Betsy Sanchez-Briones, who will attend UCLA, and Henoc Benavides, who is headed to UC Berkeley, with the scholarships at Desert Hot Springs High's awards ceremony last week. The foundation scholarships were part of an overall 42 scholarships totaling \$197,600 awarded to graduating Desert Hot Springs High students.

Among the scholarship awardees were two Public Safety Academy (PSA) students who were each awarded \$250 in memory of Palm Springs Police Department officers Lesley Zerebny and Jose "Gil" Vega, who lost their lives in the line of duty last fall. Palm Springs Unified staff members and other interested community members contributed toward the awards through the foundation as a tribute to the fallen officers. Palm Springs Police Captain Henk Peeters presented Alejandra Escamilla and Jesus Amezquita with their awards.

The foundation scholarships, which began last year, are made possible by a \$300,000 endowment from the estate of Bianca Gambi. The foundation estimates that the endowment will provide two \$40,000 scholarships each year through 2022. Students are selected from school site counselors' and principal recommendations based on criteria including: academic merit and interest, creative accomplishment, financial need, diversity of background, overcoming obstacles, community service and leadership.

"We heartily congratulate our winning students this year," said Goodman. "We're so pleased to be able to put essential higher-education funds in the hands of deserving seniors."



Palm Springs Police Department Capt. Henk Peeters congratulates Public Safety Academy scholars Alejandra Escamilla and Jesus Amezcuita, who received awards in memory of fallen officers Lesley Zerebny and Jose "Gil" Vega. *Submitted*

Goodman emphasized the role of the foundation in serving as a partner for education and youth-focused philanthropists and donors. In addition to the Gambi estate endowment, the Las Palmas Neighborhood Association in Palm Springs recently selected the foundation as the recipient of profits from the organization's participation in Palm Springs' Modernism Week events to fund district student scholarships.

"As the fundraising arm of the district, this is precisely the role we were designed to play in support of our community," Goodman said. "We look forward, as the foundation continues to expand in its reach and resources, to growing these gifts in future years."

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