

## PEOPLE

# Leaders lauded at 'Boys & Girls' Youth of the Year event



John Arismendi.

PHOTOS: KAILA JONES

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More good things are sure to come for the impressive finalists in the Boys & Girls Clubs of Indian River County 2020 Youth of the Year and Junior Youth of the Year competitions, who were recognized recently for the remarkable achievements they have already made in their young lives.

Ashanti Bryant, a member of the Vero Beach Club and a senior at Vero Beach High School, was named Youth of the Year at the 17th annual Youth of the Year Celebration that was streamed live over the BGCIRC Facebook page.

Bryant, enrolled in challenging biotechnology and health science career programs, has already attained her Certified Nursing Assistant certification through the Health Occupations Students of America program, and hopes to become a nurse practitioner and eventually a pediatric nurse practitioner.

"At a young age, I started going to the Boys & Girls Club and the staff taught me so many skills that broadened my horizons and changed my life," said Bryant, adding that she could always rely on them to give her the best advice.

Additionally, Lizeth Martinez, a Fellsmere Club member and a seventh-grade student at Sebastian River Middle School, was named Junior Youth of the Year. Martinez is on her school's AB honor role, is the Fellsmere Club Torch Club president, plays the euphonium and dreams of becoming a veterinarian.

Established in 1947, the Boys & Girls Clubs of America Youth of the Year competition recognizes the accomplishments of its members at the club and county levels, with winners progressing to the state, and potentially, regional and national levels.

"This is a special event because it gives us an opportunity to celebrate and acknowledge the achievements of our club members," said Elizabeth Thomason, BGCIRC executive director at the start of the event.

"Tonight, we honor the youth who are so vital in making our community a better place to live in," said Bill Grealis, board co-chairman. "But before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the staff for mentoring our club members, inspiring them every day afterschool and over the summer to work toward their goals and achieve academic success, good character and citizenship,



Ashanti Bryant and Gabriela Rojo.



Lizeth Martinez.

and healthy lifestyles."

Thomason echoed that staff appreciation, adding, "This year in particular has been challenging, and we would not have been able to do it without each and every one of you."

Laura Luetzger, director of operations, explained the criteria for the award, whose candidates embody the Boys & Girls Clubs of America's "three priority outcome areas of leadership, character and service; academic excellence; and healthy lifestyles."

She said members are judged on service to home and family, moral character, community service, school leadership and service, academic performance, service to the Boys & Girls Club, life goals, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, three written essays, a resume and cover letter, and their public speaking ability.

"We are incredibly proud of these young people. They all have provided quality service to their clubs and com-

munities, and have been outstanding leaders and students," said Luetzger.

The other Youth of the Year nominee was Alisha Moore, a freshman at Sebastian River High School and a longtime Fellsmere Club member. An active volunteer, she aspires to become a surgeon.

The other Junior Youth of the Year finalists were John Arismendi, a sixth-grade student and Sebastian Club member, who dreams of becoming a professional sports team coach; and Gabriela Rojo, a seventh-grade student and Vero Beach Club member, who is on her school's A-B honor roll and National Junior Honor Society, and hopes to become an architect.

"As always, the two candidates that we had this year were absolutely exemplary," said Michael Kint, who with Meredith Egan had the difficult task of choosing the winner, before announcing Ashanti Bryant as the 2020 Youth of the Year. ■