

# Academic excellence



Including this \$5,000 scholarship from GL Homes, Boys and Girls Club of St. Lucie County Youth of the Year Mia Morrison has received a total of \$250,000 in scholarships. She is the first to win the state title twice.

Morrison plans to attend Embry-Riddle University's aerospace program.

Courtesy of Boys & Girls Club of SLC

# FP teen first to get state Youth of Year prize twice

**By Donald Rodrigue**  
For Hometown News

PORT ST. LUCIE — Lincoln Park Academy senior Mia Morrison wowed the crowd at the Lucie County School Board meeting May 9 after both Assistant to the Superintendent Kevin Perry and the CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Lucie County announced she'd been selected as Florida Youth of the Year for the second year in a row.

Eight years ago, Perry met its CEO Will Armstead at a conference and the two realized their youth had a lot in common.

"That set the foundation for increasing the partnership between St. Lucie Public Schools and the Boys & Girls Clubs," he said. "Currently, they're represented in 17 of our schools, serving some 4,000-plus students each and every day."

"Our Youth of the Year program is our signature

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## Teen

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effort to forge a new generation of leaders fully prepared to live and lead in a diverse and integrated world economy," he said. "In a 21st century workplace, leadership skills such as communication, goal-setting and teamwork are essential for everyone, especially young people preparing to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood."

"I'm so honored to be here to represent the Boys and Girls Clubs of St. Lucie County, as well as all of you," she said. "All of you have personally touched my heart by what you give to our communities, by what you give to our youth, and that's poured into me. I feel so loved and supported, and I'm glad I get to represent you at regionals in Atlanta, Georgia next month."

Morrison, a Jamaican native who arrived on these shores as a young child, said she plans to attend Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach this fall where she will study aerospace engineering.

"I just found out that I received another \$40,000 scholarship to make a total of \$250,000," she said. "I've only been in America for about 10 years and Fort Pierce for

eight years. Now I have a full ride to my dream school. I thank all of you and may God bless each of you."

Morrison had already twice won the St. Lucie County Youth of the Year award before winning her first state title last year at 16. The College Board has named her a National African-American Recognition Scholar. A dual enrollment student at Indian River State College, she received her associates of arts degree from that institution on May 4 and will graduate from LPA on May 24. She has kept her grade point average in the stratosphere, noting a 5.63 GPA in January.

"I have to credit these accomplishments to my mom and my Boys & Girls Club mentors Mrs. Rasheedah Ahmad and Mrs. Cynthia Sanchez," she said. "They encouraged me to do my best and focus on my academics and leadership. They made sure I took care of my mental, physical and emotional health. I'm very grateful for them being in my life."

Morrison developed her love of engineering and the STEM curriculum [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] at an early age, playing with Legos and furniture assembly kits. Special events and field trips during her formative years at Lawnwood Elementary School and later as a middle-schooler at LPA played a pivotal role.

"In third grade, we had a STEM class and did robotics projects, building mini motor cars from scratch," she explained. "My Boys & Girls Club took me on a trip to the Kennedy space center in eighth grade. I learned more about engineering, and that propelled my research into having a career in engineering."

Her passion for engineering also got the attention of BGC partner GL Homes, the Sunrise-based firm constructing Valencia Walk at Riverland in Southwestern Port St. Lucie. On April 14, company officials gave Morrison and her mother a hard-hat tour of the development, the same day they presented her with a \$5,000 scholarship. The multiple award-winning student said she learned a lot that day about the interrelated fields of engineering.

"I got to see the step-by-step process engineers and their team have to do to build a home," she explained. "That includes laying the piping and sewage underground, building the roads, building the foundation of the house and then the home creation. It was so intriguing because I love learning about the behind-the-scenes work. I learned how many different departments have to work side-by-side on different parts for the same home. They work together like a well-oiled machine, which is one of my favorite things."

Her tour included site visits of newly completed homes and active construction sites, along with a detailed presentation on the engineering behind Riverland Paseo Park, a regional park GL Homes is giving the City of Port St. Lucie as part of its development agreement.

"Mia had a strong interest in what we do in the field and established a solid understanding of how all the moving parts fit together in construction," said GL Homes

Senior Director of Community Relations Sarah Alsofrom. "She is poised and demonstrates great maturity and confidence for someone so young. Mia is focused on her education and career goals. Many people twice her age do not possess that direction and drive."

Now an accomplished public speaker in demand by the national arm of the Boys & Girls Clubs and other entities, Morrison admits she's come a long way from the withdrawn 10-year-old suffering from the effects of early childhood abuse who walked into the BGC Westside Club complex many years ago. Now she serves as an advocate for mental health awareness.

"At first I was very shy and quiet, but over time I started engaging in their different programs, especially when I became a teen," she recalled. "I have changed a lot and broken out of my shell. Being at the club taught me that I have a voice and trained me on how to use it to help others."

The soon-to-be university freshman admits to being academically "burnt out" during the last few months of her senior year and plans to take much of the summer off before hitting the books again.

"I am taking this time to recharge with the Colorado BGC trip and the Regional Youth of the Year trip in Atlanta," she said. "When I return, I will be working at Boys & Girls Clubs, Faith in Florida, and starting an internship at TMx aero to learn about aerospace engineering. I'm also planning to go to many fun attractions around Florida for the first time with friends. During the mid-to-end of summer, I will be shadowing a class or getting tutoring in calculus and calc-based physics at the local college to make sure I'm 100 percent prepared for the next advanced classes."