Referrals a plus at Island Coast High

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Dozens of referrals are given out every day at Island Coast High School.

But a referral at that school isn’t always a bad thing.

The school began a Pro Gator referral program this year and because of it, bad referrals, for behavior such as acting up in class or fighting, are down 50 percent.

When a student does something positive such as keeping ahead of schoolwork, helping a fellow student or doing an overall good deed, they can earn a Pro Gator referral. The school’s nickname is the Gators.

Students who earned Pro Gator referrals during the first semester were entered into a drawing for a chance to win big-ticket items. The raffle was drawn recently on the school’s live TV news broadcast where seniors Natalie Cavazos walked away with a new laptop and Larry McDermott took home a new iPod.

See PRO GATOR 6

Natalie Cavazos, 18, right, was the winner of the laptop during a recent Pro Gator referral drawing at Island Coast High School.
PRO GATOR
Continued from 1

"Being good really does pay off," Cavazos said. "I think (Pro Gator) really is wonderful. I think students who are good should be recognized. Usually, it's the kids who are bad who get the attention."

And that's the point, said assistant principal Ed Matthews.

"We always can find the negative very easily," he said. "We wanted to change the mentality to recognize the positive things kids do."

Pro Gator referrals are catching on at the school, not only for students, but for teachers as well.

So far this school year, Matthews only had one cell phone reported stolen and 24 were turned in to him.

Last year, he had a cell phone reported stolen about once a week. During the first quarter last year, the school had about 800 bad referrals. This year, there were about 400.

"It's been a dramatic difference," Matthews said. "It increases class time. Kids aren't spending time in in-school suspension or time-out ... Kids are constantly asking me how they can get a Pro Gator referral."

Matthews makes it a point to call the parents of each student who earns a Pro Gator referral. About 870 of the referrals were given out during the first semester, some of which were multiple referrals for one student.

"I've had parents start crying on the phone saying they don't hear too many positive things about their child," Matthews said.

He hopes to continue the program through the help of the community. Quality Service Pros. a group of local service professionals, donated the laptop, which was worth about $700, for the first drawing. And Best Buy at Page Field Commons donated the iPod.

"Our goal is to keep the gift giving, to put laptops in the hands of children that will maximize their capabilities," said Jason Evers of Quality Service Pros. "We want students to achieve success."

After the drawing, the group left an additional laptop with Matthews for the next raffle. Matthews is reaching out to other groups in the community, hoping for additional donations that can be raffled for the program. In the meantime, he's hoping students will continue with their good deeds. Cavazos earned three referrals that got her into the drawing for the laptop, including purchasing a spirit band for a student who couldn't afford it and picking up a medical bag that was dropped by the football coach.

"I do need the laptop," Cavazos said. "I don't have a computer at all. I'll be using it for social networking, applying for college and homework."

TO DONATE
• What: Pro Gator referral program
• Purpose: Promote good student behavior
• Where: Island Coast High School
• Need: Raffle prizes to small promotional items
• Contact: Principal Ed Matthews at 458-0362.

SHOPPING

Julia Bivona, 70, of Belk's pre-sale, "I once saw two people camp outside the store overnight to give," she said, "but I don't have that luxury. All the things she would feel bad about buying..."