

Cerritos College station WPMD earns top honor



PHOTOS BY THOMAS R. CORDOVA — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Casey Piotrowski, faculty adviser, displays a trophy at Cerritos College in Norwalk as the campus radio station WPMD recently won recognition as the best community college radio station in the country from the Intercollegiate Broadcasting System.

Named nation's best community college radio station by nonprofit organization

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An ethos that combines hard work with the notion that just about any idea is worth trying may explain why students who give their time and voices to Cerritos College's radio station WPMD have earned recognition as being among the best in their field.

WPMD, its call letters an acronym for "where people make a difference," has been named the best community college radio station in the U.S. by the Intercollegiate Broadcasting System. The honor was presented by the nonprofit educational association during an awards ceremony in early March in New York City.

The WPMD team had come close to winning the community college title before, having earned their way to finalist status in four of the last five years, faculty adviser Casey Piotrowski said.

"You could make a claim, and defend it, that this is the best college radio station in the country," he said.

Although WPMD was a finalist in the broader competition for best streaming-only station from any school, community college or otherwise, with more than 10,000 students, DePaul University in Chicago claimed the top prize in that category.

Nonetheless, WPMD had a strong showing at last month's awards. The station's "The Energy Hour" was honored as the nation's most creative college radio show. Cerritos College students also claimed nominations in seven other categories.

Among other local college radio stations, Cal State Long Beach's "Mornings on the Beach/Live Lab 22" was honored as the nation's most innovative college radio program.

Inside the WPMD studio

The WPMD Broadcasting Club has nearly 60 participants, and those who take the time to prepare for an on-air assignment experience the opportunities and challenges



Student Reyes Conde takes in the activities at Cerritos College's radio station.

that come with the freedom to develop their own programming.

"They get really surprised when they hear that they can pretty much broadcast whatever they want to broadcast," said Justine Santos, who co-hosts "K-Krazies," a show for K-pop fans.

Other WPMD hosts use their time on the station to share sounds from various musical genres, riff on current events or provide a glimpse into topics such as pro wrestling, cinema, hockey and politics. The station also broadcasts live feeds of student government meetings and recorded audio from Cerritos and Norwalk City Council meetings.

Some examples:

- Rebecca Aguila, who plays punk and ska music while co-hosting "Unorthodox Radio": "I want to give backyard bands a chance to get their music out."

- A.J. Norman, who talks movies while co-hosting "Film Nerds": "I want to get out to the people how films are made."

- German Sanchez, whose words can be heard on "The Nerd Culture" and aspires to a career in NPR-style narrative journalism: "Everybody has a story. A voice."

"The kids can play whatever they want, as long as it's clean," Piotrowski said. "The kids can talk as much as they want, as long as it makes sense."

The clip that helped "The Energy Hour" win its award features co-hosts Audrey Valdivia and Valerie Castrillon in a free-flowing conversation between broadcasts of hip-hop tracks. Their talk starts with an anecdote about how to deal with a gym workout that didn't work out totally well ("stretch, Icy Hot and an Advil") before flowing to Castrillon's admiration for Kendrick Lamar's "Damn" and their musings on current events.

Although talk provided a foundation for "The Energy Hour," the show's music selections provided another way for the hosts to connect with each other and their audience.

"The music of the day, that's how we emotionally were that day," Valdivia said.

And just maybe, the listeners would be in the same mood as the hosts.

"We wanted to give people a reason to listen and jam out with us," Castrillon said.

"The Energy Hour" is no longer on WPMD's schedule, and Castrillon has moved on to a radio job beyond the Cerritos College campus. She said she works as a promotions assistant for Entercom Communications, a radio company with a portfolio of more than 200 stations, including K-Earth 101, KROQ and 93.1 Jack FM.

Broadcasting by the beach

Cal State Long Beach is also home to an award-winning radio show, "Mornings on the Beach," also known as "Live Lab 22." The Intercollegiate Broadcasting System's choice as the nation's most innovative college program, it fulfills the role of