Custodial Team Wins Law School Praise

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They arrive at the James E. Rogers College of Law every morning before most students and professors and then work tirelessly throughout the day, with smiles on their faces, to keep the school looking clean and orderly.

They are the members of the law school custodial team, who were honored for their hard work during the college's end of the year ice cream social and awards ceremony last week.

The Student Bar Association, which gives awards to student-selected administrators, staff members and instructors each year, presented certificates and plaques to Lupita Fannin, Mariana Hernandez, Luz Rodriguez and Graciela Varela.

The women won the Staff Member of the Year honor, usually awarded to a single individual, by a landslide, receiving three times the votes as their closest competitor, said Stephanie Linden, president of the Student Bar Association, the law school's student government organization. All law school students were invited to vote online.

"It was a big surprise. I'm so happy," said Fannin, who has worked at the UA for 14 years.

Linden, who presented the awards, praised the custodians' cheerful and positive attitude as they work to "ensure our school operates smoothly and looks good doing it."

"We all know how many pizza boxes are left over during a lunch meeting and how some of us forget to throw away our trash during finals," she joked.

Tim Bearese, a third-year law student, nominated the women for the award.

"They earned it. They work so hard and they're always pleasant. They keep the mood of the place high," he said.

It also doesn't hurt that they laugh at his jokes and help him practice his Spanish, added Bearese, a member of the Student Bar Association. Â

Varela has worked at the UA for four years and Hernandez for three. Rodriguez, the team's veteran, has been at the UA for 33 years and has spent 21 of those years at the College of Law.

She doesn't plan to go anywhere else.

"Everybody's so nice. If I have to work another 20 years, I'll work here," Rodriguez said.

The Student Bar Association also gave awards to Kay Kavanagh, associate dean of academic affairs, who was named Administrator of the Year; Arizona Supreme Court Justice Scott
Bales, who was named Adjunct/Visiting Faculty Member of the Year; and clinical professor Paul D. Bennet and professor Thomas A. Mauet, who were presented with John W. Strong Teaching Awards.

However, it was the custodial team's award that brought the crowd to its feet for a standing ovation.

"They're just amazing," Bearese said.

Also during the ceremony, which took place Thursday in the lobby of the College of Law, Dean Lawrence Ponoroff presented the Leslie F. & Patricia Bell Faculty Awards to professors Barbara A. Atwood and Marc Miller and the Norma J. Kelly Staff Award for Excellence to Carloyln Coolidge, support systems analyst, and Karen Russell, an associate accountant in the Law Library. He also acknowledged law school members who are leaving or retiring and read the names of those celebrating milestone years of service, in five-year increments from 10 to 40 years.