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Press Contact: Terese Kelly Greer
Rosica Communications
201-843-5600
terese@rosica.com

Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey Announce Olympic Gold Medalist Laurie Hernandez as Master of Ceremonies for New Jersey State Youth of the Year Gala

Program recognizes most exceptional Boys & Girls Club teen members, who embody the values of leadership, service, academic excellence and healthy lifestyles, and selects a State and Military winner at Gala and Awards Ceremony on June 6th

Clifton, NJ (May 15, 2017) – The Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey announced today that 2016 Olympic Gold & Silver Medalist and “Dancing with the Stars” Champion Laurie Hernandez will serve as Master of Ceremonies for the NJ State Youth of the Year gala on June 6th at Montclair State University, Conference Center Ballroom in Montclair, NJ.

The Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey Youth of the Year gala and awards ceremony celebrate the extraordinary achievements of New Jersey’s most exceptional Club teens. The event will include the announcement of the 2017 New Jersey State and Military Youth of the Year winners. A total of \$60,000 in college scholarships will be awarded.

“My goal of making it the Olympic Games motivated me to work very hard in my sport. I am honored to serve as Master of Ceremonies of BGCNJ’s Youth of the Year gala, and celebrate New Jersey’s most inspiring Club teen leaders who have also worked so hard to achieve success,” said Olympic Gold Medalist Laurie Hernandez.

“We are thrilled Laurie is serving as the Master of Ceremonies for this premier recognition program that celebrates NJ Club teen leaders. We know the NJ Youth of the Year finalists will be inspired by Laurie’s tremendous passion, hard work and dedication towards achieving her dreams. In turn, Laurie will be inspired by the incredible achievements of NJ Boys & Girls Club youth in pursuing their goals and dreams,” said State Director, Susan Haspel.

Laurie Hernandez burst onto the Senior Elite Gymnastics scene, just in time for the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. Her goal had always been to make an Olympic Team and her dream came true! Laurie started gymnastics at the age of 6 when she asked her mother to enroll her in the sport because she had so much energy and always wanted to experience the feeling of flying.

Laurie is second generation American, as her grandparents are from Puerto Rico, making her the first U.S. born Latina to make the U.S. team since 1984. Laurie credits her hard work, leadership skills, and “never give up” attitude to her Mom, who was in the Army Reserves while Laurie was growing up. Since bringing home the Gold and Silver medals at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, Laurie has gone on to win the coveted Mirrorball Trophy on “Dancing with the Stars” Season 23 and published (January 2017) her first book titled, “I Got This: To Gold and Beyond” chronicling her journey thus far.

Laurie's other career highlights include "Dancing with the Stars" Live! Tour, Kellogg's Tour of Gymnastics Champions, 2016 U.S. Olympic Trials, 2016 National Championships, 2016 Pac Rim Championships, 2016 City of Jesolo Trophy, 2015 U.S. Classic Champion, 2015 City of Jesolo Trophy and 2015 International Junior Japan Meet.

For more information on the Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey's Youth of the Year gala, visit bgcnj.org or call 973-773-0966, x151.

About Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey

Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey is an alliance of 23 Boys & Girls Club organizations serving over 70,000 youth ages 5-18 throughout the Garden State. Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey is a collaborative effort representing all 23 Clubs with the purpose of building local Club capacity; raising public awareness; and securing resources and financial support to increase the impact and reach of local Clubs. Learn more at www.bgcnj.org

About Laurie Hernandez

Laurie Hernandez is an American gymnast, an Olympic gold medalist, and a Dancing with the Stars champion. At the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio, Laurie won silver in the individual balance beam competition and secured gold in the team all-around competition. Laurie started gymnastics at the age of six because she wanted to experience the feeling of flying. She enrolled at Monmouth Gymnastics in New Jersey, where she met her coach, and they became a winning duo. The turning point in Laurie's career came in 2014, when her progress was stalled due to multiple injuries. She returned stronger than ever by becoming the 2015 US junior national champion. Laurie's other career highlights include all-around silver, beam gold, and floor exercise bronze at the 2016 US Olympic Trials, and bronze in all-around, floor exercise, beam, and uneven bars at the 2016 national championships. Laurie is known for her dazzling floor exercise routines and for her grace and artistry on the balance beam. And she has been nicknamed "the Human Emoji" for her outgoing facial expressions.