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### Tropical classroom wins makeover prize

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MERRITT ISLAND -- An awestruck Virginia Hamilton, teacher for gifted students at Tropical Elementary School, walked into her remodeled classroom Friday morning.

She stared at the paw prints that dotted the walls. Framed canine posters hung throughout the room. A stuffed toy dog slept in a small bed on the floor near a reading corner with comfortable student chairs.

"Look what they did! It's gorgeous," Hamilton said. "That's so colorful. You guys are phenomenal."

Hamilton, an 18-year Brevard County teacher, won a classroom "extreme makeover" from LifeStyle Homes. She is the fifth to win what the company calls an "education renovation."

Students nominate their teachers; LifeStyle selects monthly finalists and the winner in May.

Pooches became the theme because Hamilton and her class are known as the "Canine Commandos." They volunteer at a shelter preparing dogs for adoption.

"This is great," said Superintendent Richard DiPatri, who attended the unveiling. "It says a lot about community support. To have others come into the schools and do this is powerful."

Hamilton received an "overwhelming" number of nominations, LifeStyle Homes said.

But the company also took into consideration budget cuts in Brevard Public Schools that put \$2.84 million in improvements on hold at Tropical. Oceanside Cabinets, Personal Touch Countertops and Color Wheel Paint also donated materials to the effort.

"Education renovation" is the brainchild of Larry Hufford and John Luch, co-founders of LifeStyle Homes. Both are former Florida public school educators.

"This is just a dream. It's like an out-of-body experience," Hamilton said.

LifeStyles worked for three weeks on the classroom, while she taught in another room.

Her students also adored the changes.

"It's awesome. I love it," fourth-grader Hannah Peery said.

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