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## Tropical students feel right at home in new classroom

### Teacher enjoys results of renovation

*BY JAMIE J. ANDERSON  
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MERRITT ISLAND — Students at Tropical Elementary School enjoy a home-away-from-home in Virginia Hamilton's gifted classroom.

The uniquely decorated classroom was recently remodeled as part of the LifeStyle Homes Education Renovation program. The room now features a "living room," free-standing lamps and live plants.

"The at-home feel helps facilitate instruction," said Hamilton, a teacher for 18 years.

The room's theme is "all things dogs." The students, known as the Canine Commandos because of their volunteer work at local shelters training dogs in preparation for adoption, are thrilled with their new classroom décor.

"It's my favorite classroom," said 8-year-old Anna Bolger. "It seems more like home, and the doggie stuff is great."

The room now features bright yellow walls with a border of multi-colored paw prints leading to the door. The designers placed live plants throughout the room along with free-standing lamps rather than the fluorescent lighting usually built into classrooms. The living room area, which acts as the room's reading center, is complete with three disc chairs placed on a rug along with a stuffed animal dog sleeping in a dog bed.

The team also built additional shelves to store student projects and new computer desks with Corian countertops. Hamilton received a matching teacher's desk.

"They thought of everything down to the smallest details," Hamilton said. "The room has become user friendly."

The classroom is used by Hamilton and 100 gifted and academically talented students at Tropical Elementary.

Hamilton was one of 12 monthly LifeStyle Homes winners who received a \$500 gift card. She was then chosen in July as the yearly winner. The renovations began in late August and lasted only two weeks.

"No one deserved the makeover more than she and her students did," said Jake Luhn, director of sales and marketing of LifeStyle Homes. "Our company was founded by two former school teachers, Larry Hufford and John Luhn, so they understand how incredibly important it is to give back to the school system."

Hamilton was chosen as the fourth annual winner in part because of the service learning projects she completes with her students and also because of the budget cuts at the school, Luhn said. Tropical Elementary was in line for \$2.84 million in improvements that will now be postponed due to budget cuts within Brevard Public Schools.

After nearly a month in the room, Hamilton and her students are settling in nicely.

“My students still have grins on their faces as they walk around the room and ‘ooohhh’ and ‘aaahhh’ when they find little things that weren’t here before,” Hamilton said.

As part of a classroom project, the students recently wrote thank you cards to the employees of LifeStyle Homes.

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