

BEAUTIFUL LESSONS

A VISIT TO A TOP MODELING AGENCY IN SOUTH BEACH INSPIRED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO IMPROVE THEMSELVES

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When Rachel Desert walked into a top South Beach modeling agency on Friday, the high school student expected to get tips on how to pose for the cameras and walk down a runway.

She got that and a whole lot more, including life lessons, from agency founder Irene Marie, supermodel Nikki Taylor and *Wild on E!* host Cindy Taylor, no relation to Nikki.

"I learned that with determination, you can overcome any obstacle," said Desert, 17, a junior from North Miami Beach Senior High School.

"Nikki also said her parents were very supportive of her career. That's very important."

Desert belongs to the Women of Tomorrow, where at-risk high school girls receive mentoring from successful professional women and get a behind-the-scenes look at various industries in South Florida.

The program operates in 98 high schools in Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties. School officials choose students from the ninth to 12th grades to participate. The goal is for successful women to help teenagers realize their potential.

On Friday, six girls from Hialeah-Miami Lakes Senior High School joined Desert and five other students from North Miami Beach High for a tour of Irene Marie's modeling agency on Ocean Drive. All of the students wore matching red polo shirts, black pants and black high-heel pumps for the occasion.

Marie, whose agency launched the career of both Taylors and hundreds of other top models, has been a founding mentor with Women of Tomorrow since



PHOTOS BY MARICE COHN BAND/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

ROLE MODELS: A dozen girls from Hialeah-Miami Lakes and North Miami Beach Senior high schools, above, pose with Irene Marie, owner of Irene Marie Modeling Agency. Priscilla Kiely, 17, below, a senior at Hialeah Miami Lakes gets an autograph from Steven Mueller, one of the agency's models.



Jennifer Valoppi, a former WTVJ-NBC 6 news anchor, started the program in 1997. The girls received wide-ranging advice from the three women.

'You've got to take care of your body. It's important to be mentally and physically strong.'

- NIKKI TAYLOR
model, host of 'Wild on E!'

Marie and Nikki Taylor showed them how to walk with the proper attitude on a runway located in the back terrace of the agency's building.

"Wherever you are and wherever you are going, stand up straight and put your shoulders back," Marie said. "That's the beginning. That shows you have confidence."

Cindy Taylor told the girls, "you've got to take care of your body. It's important to be mentally and physically strong."

Some ways to stay well: exercise, eat healthy and take long hot showers, she said.

Nikki Taylor reminded the students to take full advantage of opportunities that come their way.

"If you're not scared and the door is open, walk through it," she said.

That advice resonated with Nichelle Martinez, a senior at Hialeah-Miami Lakes.

"Confidence is something important that you need," said the 17-year-old student, who has been with the program for three years. "Every woman should have it to succeed."

Martinez said she improved her grades this year and just finished applying to the University of Central Florida and Florida International University.

"Every year the Women of Tomorrow is different. We grow with the program," she said.