POTPOURRI

'Just Be Yourself,' Says Teen Pageant Winner

By PAULA STUART
THE LEDGER
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One of Polk County's own cowgirls is the new Miss Teen Rodeo Florida 2012.
Dariann Smith, 18, of Polk City captured the queen title at the pageant held Sept. 29 through Oct. 1 at the Osceola Heritage Park, Silver Spurs Arena in Kissimmee. In addition to the title, Smith placed first in the categories of horsemanship and the state speech competition.

Laura Kessler, president for the Miss Rodeo Florida Association, said, "Very rarely do we have girls come from this area, and I don't know why because we are right here. We've got to keep this going. I am very impressed with Dariann already. I have grown up here and have been doing this for 30-plus years. She was like a burst of sunshine. She is the whole package. She is smart, beautiful, she's goal-oriented, super motivated. I have never seen someone prepare for a pageant so quickly and be so ready."

Smith will officially take reign Jan. 1. Pageant officials carry eight queens from October through January. The 51-year-old pageant is divided into four age divisions and is open to all Florida residents.

Smith, a senior at Auburndale High, is also a member of the school's Future Farmers of America chapter and said this was her first rodeo queen pageant. Smith said when her name was announced as the winner, she froze.

"I looked at my parents and my father started crying then I bust out crying," she said.

In addition to winning the crown and title, Smith also won a saddle, the horsemanship belt buckle, the queen belt buckle, a plaque for winning the speech competition, a plaque for winning the horsemanship title, a variety of gifts for her horse, a personal briefcase, jewelry, scrapbooking supplies, and makeup.

Smith has advice for any girl thinking about entering a pageant.

She said, "Just be yourself. You've got to be natural, have fun, and go for it. I gave it my all and I was nobody but myself and I won. The judges like a natural, outgoing, Southern girl," she said.

Kessler said the association is always looking for people to volunteer to work with the girls to instill professionalism, good work ethic, a love for their state and for the sport of rodeo. For more information, log onto www.missrodeoFlorida.com.

LAKELAND RESIDENT COMES UP A WINNER

Lakeland resident and lifelong "Wheel of Fortune" fan Timothy Bunday won $50,000 and a trip to the Canadian Rockies by watching "Wheel of Fortune" and being a part of the show's Wheel Watchers Club. Bunday, a salesman for a company that makes plastic extrusions, has been a Wheel Watchers Club member for the past four years. He watches every single night, hoping to see his "SPIN ID" displayed.

"When I saw my SPIN ID on the TV, I was so excited about the trip that I completely forgot that I also own a Sony Card, which means I was a $50,000 winner!" he said. The Wheel Watchers Club, on Sony Rewards, is the first long term viewer loyalty program in television history. It provides a direct method of rewarding and communicating with loyal fans. The Wheel Watchers Club offers free membership to viewers at WheelofFortune.com. For additional information, contact Leslie Jacobie, Wheel of Fortune Publicity and Promotions, 10202 West Washington Blvd., Robert Young Bldg., Culver City, CA 90232 or call 310-244-3396

A TIME TO GIVE

Cynthia Grimes of Lakeland deserves our applause. Grimes, 24, is a full time student at Keiser University. Her photo hangs on the "wall of fame" there. She is on the dean’s list and in the Phi Theta Kappa national honor society, but that's not the main reason I asked you all to start clapping. Grimes adopts needy children during the holiday season who would otherwise not have a Christmas at all.

This will be the third year Grimes has taken on the role of ensuring a bright Christmas for needy, local children. Grimes said her inspiration came from her childhood, when her parents divorced and her stepfather provided a tree and gifts to ensure a nice memory for them. She said without that, she would have questioned why Santa didn't visit at all.

"My last inspiration is my dad. He said I would never amount to anything. I do not associate with him anymore, but I take his negative feedback and turn it into something good. I push myself to be a better person through school or whatever I have my hands in. My mother always tells me I turn mud into roses. No matter the situation I can turn it into a positive or find something positive in it," she said.

Grimes said her future hopes are to have her own non-profit organization. So far, Grimes has been doing this work alone.

"The first year I had nine children, the second year 19 children. The first year I did it completely by myself. Then my family and friends caught on to what I was doing and wanted to help. My goal this year is 50 children. I currently have 10 on my list. I don't want this to get out of hand because I am only one person. I would love it if I could get donations and maybe find other children that need a Christmas in the Lakeland area," she said.

Anyone wishing to join Grimes in this community work may contact her at 863-701-4991 or cindycrexhf@yahoo.com. Best wishes in achieving your goal this year, Cynthia!

READY TO READ

The Junior League of Greater Lakeland (JLGL), in conjunction with the Learning Resource Center (LRC), recently held its "Ready to Read Fall Parent Night" for the students and parents of Crystal Lake Elementary School. The evening hosted leading educators from the center as they offered revolutionary literacy skills and skill-building activities in a workshop setting that would enable students to learn fundamental techniques necessary for reading.

In addition, the Junior League distributed books to each family who participated that evening. Recently, the Ready to Read community project received a $2,000 grant from Target. The money received will enable the Junior League to achieve its goal of providing school-wide literacy related activities, which include parental participation, and supplies to the teachers and students of Crystal Lake Elementary School.

Junior League President Samantha Parker Hopkins said the Junior League of
Greater Lakeland, Inc. strives to enhance child welfare and education in the greater Lakeland area by promoting the basic skills necessary for school readiness and family literacy through Signature Projects. Members actively reach more than 10,000 families through organizing fun literacy events, reading to pre-school children and supporting elementary school literacy efforts. For more information, visit their website at http://www.jlgl.com.

Nice job, ladies!

ANNIVERSARIES

Happy anniversary to Christine and Joseph Elliott (7), today; Sara and Dennis Wynn (36). Charles and Melissa Dormer (18), Saturday; Charlene and Jim Valerino (36), Monday; Luigi and Anna Castro (3). Lori and Mike Butler (31), Tuesday.

BIRTHDAYS

Happy birthday to Shirley Whitney, Dolores Grover, Donnell Jones, today; Rebecca Herrmann (89), Joan Carroll, Mary Bivens, Saturday; John C. Boselman (44), Sunday; Dale Smith, Monday; Rusty Carroll, Rashanna Harvey (14), Tuesday; Alex Thompson (47), Wednesday.

[ Send your news regarding civic groups, social clubs, religious organizations, special events and community news to Paula Stuart at pstuart88@gmail.com or to The Ledger, 455 Sixth St. N.W., Winter Haven, FL 33881. Fax is 863-401-6999. Photos are welcome. ]

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