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Thurston County trio seek crowns Pageants: Royalty awaits winners in Burien

MOLLY GILMORE; For The Olympian | Published October 05, 2009

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This weekend, Miss Olympia USA, Miss Lacey USA and Miss Thurston County Teen USA will be strutting their stuff in evening gowns and swimsuits in hopes of winning one of those pageants.

The winner of the Miss Washington USA pageant will go on to compete for Miss USA and, just maybe, Miss Universe. The winner of Miss Washington Teen USA will go on to try for Miss Teen USA.

The local competitors are Miss Olympia USA, Mariah Mao; Miss Lacey USA, Amberly Krist; and Elisabeth Jackson of Olympia, the teen contestant.

Though they have titles and sashes to match, the women haven't had to win a preliminary competition. They did have to go through an application process and raise money or find sponsors. (Krist's family had a big garage sale.)

Jackson, 18, a senior at River Ridge High School, competed in the National American Miss pageant when she was 12, and again at 14.

"When I was in elementary school, I was very shy," she said. "I'd just moved from a private school to a big public school. I was uncomfortable talking to people I didn't know.

"My mom wanted me to get out there and be more comfortable talking to people.

"That weekend did change my life, not to sound clichéd," she said. "I had to open up and come out of my comfort zone."

State Pageants

What: Three Thurston County women are competing in the Miss Washington USA and Miss Washington Teen USA pageants, where they will be evaluated in interviews and in swimsuit and evening-gown competitions. The winners will compete in the Miss USA and Miss Teen USA pageants.

When: Preliminaries are at 4 p.m. Saturday; finals at 1 p.m. Sunday.

Where: Highline Performing Arts Center, 401 S. 152nd St., Burien.

Tickets: \$15 to \$75

Information: 800-838-3006, www.misswashingtonusa.com or www.brownpapertickets.com/event/83900

2003, is a former Lakemair princess and last year was the first runner-up in the Miss Thurston County pageant. (The competition is part of the Miss America pageant.)

"I have watched Miss America since I was 3 years old," said Krist, who plans to attend The Evergreen State College, beginning in the winter. "This was something I had wanted forever. It's not just a beauty pageant.

"It's about fitness and going back to school and volunteering your time. It's a bigger picture, and I think people here don't know that about pageants."

But for Mao, who's studying pre-physiology at the University of Arizona, Miss Washington USA will be her first pageant.

"I'm doing this for the experience of it," said Mao, who graduated from Olympia High School in 2008. "It's a lot of fun."

The Miss USA and Miss Teen USA pageants don't have a talent competition. There's an interview, an evening gown competition and a swimsuit competition.

The audience at the pageant, held in Burien, will see only the latter two events.

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