



# YOUTHFUL PAGEANTRY

Teenage beauty and talent pageants come in a variety of forms with differing appeals and benefits **BY MASON WEST**

In this modern age of women's rights and girl power, it may seem to some that the tradition of beauty/talent pageants doesn't support the ideal of female equality. But Frank Sweeney, creator of the Miss Teen All American pageant, said that pageants are not demeaning to women. Instead, he said, pageants make women feel good about themselves.

"Women want to be in pageants for the same reason men want to be in athletics: There is a sense of competition and achievement," he said.

The Miss Teen All American pageant is currently looking for young women between the ages of 13 and 19 to represent Oregon in the national pageant this August. Unlike other pageants such as Miss Teen USA, there will be no qualifying pageant in the state to make selections for the national competition. Instead, young women will submit a photograph and biography to a panel assembled within Sweeney's company.

Because of the unusual selection process, there can be more than one representative from a state in the national competition. Last year, there were more than 120 participants in the pageant.

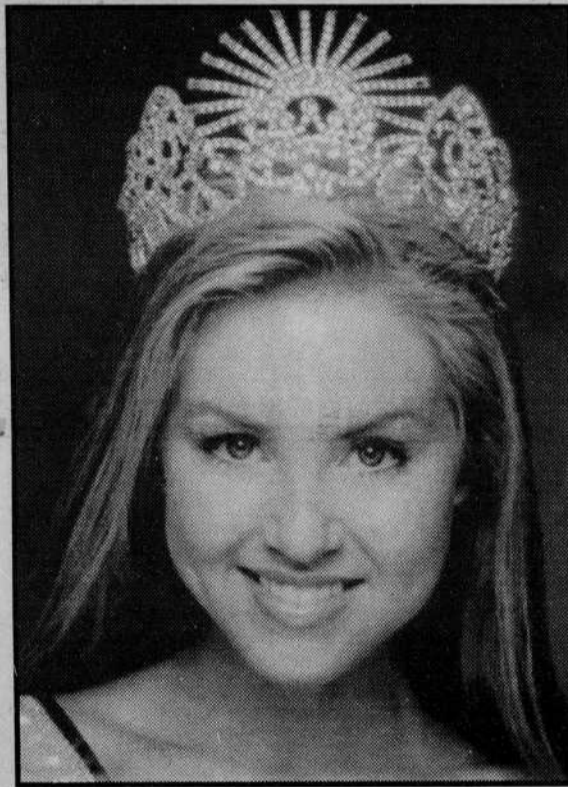
"This is not the Electoral College," Sweeney said. "Our pageant is designed to represent population centers, not state boundaries."

Sweeney created the Miss Teen All American pageant in 1978 because he believed no existing pageant clearly reflected the lifestyles of teenagers. While Sweeney himself claims to be "older than dirt," his pageant keeps changing based on the young women who participate.

According to Sweeney, a young woman

who wants to participate in a pageant should be in shape the same way a scholar or athlete needs to be prepared for his or her respective competitions. The rigors of the Miss Teen All American pageant include both evening gown and swimsuit competitions and a personal interview.

The spoils of being Miss Teen All American include, but aren't limited to, clothing, jewelry, travel and \$5,000. However, Sweeney is quick to point out that although there is no application or registration fee, contestants must pay \$799 after they choose to participate in the pageant. This fee covers costs of putting on the event.



Courtesy  
Cali Tucker wears the Miss Teen All American crown for 2000.

Every pageant holds its own allure and has its own benefits. A representative from the Miss Teen USA pageant said her company will help their pageant winners advance themselves in any direction they choose.

"We pride ourselves on opening doors for our young women," she said.

But pageants aren't limited to evening gowns and good posture. Marla Meadows, a junior psychology major at the University, has participated in the rodeo pageant circuit since she age 12. Although there is always a personal element in a contestant's desire to compete, Meadows believes she can help others with her position.

"I really enjoy the experience, but it gives

me the chance to give back to the rodeo," she said.

Meadows grew up around horses and rodeos, which initially sparked her interest, but it was a recommendation from her sixth-grade teacher that caused her to take the plunge into pageants. From her humble beginnings in a junior court, Meadows currently holds the title of Miss Eugene Pro Rodeo, a position that carries duties such as speaking at events and riding her horse in parades. Her jewel-encrusted crown even fits over her cowboy hat.

Meadows believes her job is to interest people in the rodeo and in Eugene. She said rodeo pageants are much different from traditional beauty pageants. In a rodeo pageant, the contestants need to have knowledge about equestrian sport and history as well as riding ability, and perfect physical appearance is not a requirement, she said.

"You should compete against yourself, not other people," Meadows said. "Physical appearance isn't as important as how you carry yourself."

As Miss Eugene Pro Rodeo, Meadows is planning to compete in the 2002 Miss Rodeo Oregon pageant. The winner of that competition will be eligible for the Miss Rodeo America pageant. Meadows said it is best to move through pageants in steps, but she already has a hopeful eye on the national title.

If any young women have similar aspirations for national recognition but aren't interested in riding horses, they can call (304) 242-4900 or e-mail teenalam@aol.com to find out more information about applying for the Miss Teen All American pageant.



Photo courtesy Marla Meadows  
Miss Eugene Pro Rodeo, Marla Meadows, waves a perfectly cupped hand in the Meier & Frank Christmas Parade in Portland.