

COMMENTARY

Pageant 'royals' work hard

GUEST COMMENTARY

Amy Seely

I am writing in response to Julie Lauderbaugh's editorial entitled "Rewarding achievement with celebrity," (ODE, June 3). As a University sophomore and the Rose Festival Queen from 2000-01, I was surprised by some of the inaccuracies in the information presented about the Rose Festival Court. Being a high school ambassador is not only about "freezing their grades a month and a half prior to graduation, clothing them with sponsors' digs and sticking them on a float with a crown."

In fact, not all high schools freeze grades and the ones that do understand that the court schedule, which involves visiting retirement homes, meeting with at-risk youth and volunteering in the community makes it difficult to attend classes.

The "sponsors' digs" which they wear are not to reward them or set them apart, but rather to provide similar and appropriate attire for 14 girls from different economic backgrounds. Because of this, none of the girls will feel singled out because of what they wear, or what they can or can't afford to buy.

Lauderbaugh also failed to mention the factor that persuaded me to participate in the Rose Festival, which is the \$3,000 college scholarship that every ambassador receives upon selection. Indeed,

this scholarship made it possible for me to attend the University, and for that I am grateful.

Personally, I take offense to the statement that "recognizing young women because of their philanthropic tendencies alone ... (is) old fashioned," and that Portland's way of honoring its young achievers is "outdated." Why not reward young people for contributing their time to philanthropic pursuits? How is this different from a news channel's "Athlete of the Week" or a high school's valedictorian?

Finally, I was disappointed with Lauderbaugh's statement that hopefully "Queen Leela can dispel some of the stereotypes bequeathed to her by previous pageant winners." As one of two Rose Festival queens currently attending the University and one of many past ambassadors, I would challenge Lauderbaugh to find a more diverse, intellectual, involved, and successful group of young women on campus.

Indeed, our five minutes of "celebrity" fame did little to deter us from what we enjoy doing, nor was it the pinnacle of, or reason for, our community service. Whether it's as a member of

Black Women of Achievement, a volunteer for the Special Olympics, a philanthropy chair for a greek organization, or any other extracurricular activity in which we are involved, we do it for ourselves and others; not for a title and crown.

In closing, I am a Presidential Scholar with a 4.07 GPA who recently organized a philanthropy that raised \$2,000 for the Make-A-Wish Foundation, and my credentials are not the most impressive of the past "pageant winners" that I know. If by the past "stereotype" of Rose Festival ambassadors, Lauderbaugh means successful and philanthropically inclined young women, then I would say Queen Leela has big shoes to fill and that she has also been doing an excellent job.

My question to Lauderbaugh is this: I know you may be cynical, but at least now will you please take us seriously?

Amy Seely is a sophomore anthropology major.

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