

Pageant means lots of work for its organizer

Don't look for Vicki Gunderson peeking from behind the curtain at the Miss Mt. Hood Area Pageant Saturday night.

Instead, she'll be "hiding" in the light booth at the back of the Mt. Hood Community College Auditorium.

"I'm so nervous, I make the girls nervous," she laughs.

And besides, not only is she director for the pageant, she also gives the lighting and sound cues to technicians.

And when she isn't wearing that hat, she is chaperone, mom, disciplinarian, emergency seamstress, teacher and friend to the 10 contestants.

Vicki Gunderson has for 10 years been the driving force behind the Miss Mt. Hood Area Pageant — the contest that sends competitors on to the Miss Oregon Scholarship Pageant.

She's pretty good at it too. In every year but two, "her girls" have finished in the top 10 finalists in Seaside. She's had several first and second runners-up as well.

Gunderson, and her husband, Gunner, have been involved in pageants since they ran the Miss Estacada pageant. They picked up the Gresham area franchise in 1976 when the Gresham Jaycees decided not to renew their franchise. When the Miss Oregon pageant began to run low on contestants five years ago, Gunderson was allowed to crown a second winner, Miss Metro East.

She's also a field officer for the Miss Oregon Scholarship Pageant. That means she is over several pageants in the state to act as a liaison between them and the state pageant.

This year, because there is no Miss Portland contest, Gunderson's competitors also come from Portland as well as Sandy, Gresham and East County.

An unpaid volunteer, Gunderson works year-round on the pageant. Her work begins in earnest in January with the opening tea for contestants. This year more than 75 contestants entered.

She gives them all a free lesson in walking, poise, grooming and other skills necessary to win. Then in a preliminary pageant in March, the girls are whittled down to just a handful.

That's when the work begins all over again. In 11 rehearsals, the semi-finalists are taught how to stand, how to talk, to walk, to move, to perform.

"I think it's important. Other pageants just bring them into the pageant and that's it," she says. "This gives the girls something too. Regardless of whether they make it through to the Miss Oregon pageant, they will learn how to conduct themselves in an interview, how to be poised just about anywhere. And someday they can go out and get a job because they have those good skills."

Saturday night's winners will not compete for the Miss Oregon title at the July competition. Instead they are "held over" for a year and will compete in the July 1984 pageant.

"This gives them a full year to get ready, to learn to relax in interview, swimsuit, the whole pageant," Gunderson explains. "And they teach next year's contestants what they know."

Gunderson believes the pageant has grown far beyond simply a beauty pageant.

"They learn responsibility," she says. "All their lives they're going to have to know responsibility."

The non-profit pageant is also self-supporting. Volunteers work throughout the year to gather donations and advertising to pay for the franchise and the scholarship fund.

Gunderson credits her volunteers for making the pageant a success each year and for being able to offer the richest package of prizes for winners.

In addition to her long hours, Gunderson's husband serves as executive director, stage manager, treasurer and "official prop builder. Ozell Hazzle is vice president and sound engineer along with Lee Middleton.

Ted Tanory is pageant photographer and his wife, Bernie Tanory, is production assistant, seamstress and works backstage during the pageant. Alma Gunderson handles props, tickets and is pageant seamstress.

Marlene Womack is Gunderson's executive assistant, bookkeeper and cares for the pageant's piles of correspondence. Sally Mack is this year's choreographer.

This year's production crew includes Master of Ceremonies Phil Stetson; dancers, Irv Hazzle, Robert Spradling, Jimmy Renfro; the Sally Mack dancers, Brett Heine, David Stafford, Chris Kenney, Amy Swan, Paina Hirisela and Jill Getman; and singers Michelle Middleton, Pam Cansler, Renfro, Tony Gunderson, Rena Nelson and Cheryl Kennedy.



Vicki Gunderson is the driving force behind the pageant

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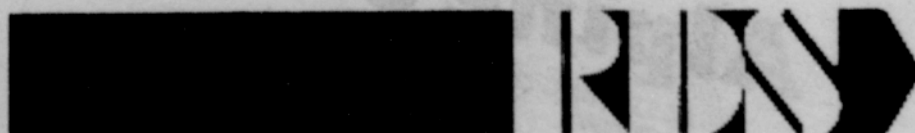
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