

Feeling Sluggish?

The 42nd Annual SLUG Queen Pageant and Coronation is August 9 — meet the contestants

BY SAVANNAH BROWN

It's that time of year again to slither downtown for the annual SLUG Queen Pageant and Coronation Friday, August 9, and it will be an evening full of swirling and twirling, local celebrity judges and old queen pinning ceremonies.

A SLUG queen, the monarch of the Society for the Legitimization of the Ubiquitous Gastropod, is understood to be the “unofficial goodwill ambassador of Eugene.” During their one year “rain,” they make appearances at public events and work with the nonprofit of their choice.

Wannabe queens develop a “slugsona” with a name, a costume and an optional theme. Leading up to the competition, they are heavily encouraged to bribe the judging panel of 26 old queens — not former, literally old — and local celebrity judges to increase their odds of winning.

Because slugs don't have wallets, they prefer artsy handmade gifts or other creative swag to ooze and schmooze them. Wannabees then participate in the SLUG queen pageant in their slugsona and showcase a three-minute talent, answer a question and hilarity ensues.

With all that in mind, let's meet some of this year's candidates.



CAROLEE HIRSCH, AKA NONNY SLUGSWORDS
WITH HER DAUGHTER, JILYNN CHERISH,
AKA, RAINING QUEEN JUBILEE HEDONISTO

Carolee Hirsch, aka Nonny Slugswords

Carolee Hirsch isn't just any wannabe queen. She is the queen mother. When her daughter, Jilynn Cherish, ran for SLUG queen in 2023, she made Hirsch a shirt that said “Hopeful Queen Mother.” When Cherish as Jubilee Hedonisto began her rain, the first word of the shirt was removed, and Hirsch donned her title with pride throughout this last year.

She did not plan on taking her daughter's crown, but when Hedonisto asked her if she knew anyone who would be interested in the next SLUG pageant, Nonny Slugswords oozed over to take on the job. “Nepotism?” She teases.

Hirsch knows that she will always be an old queen mother to Hedonisto whether she gets the SLUG Queen title or not. Either way, she's excited for her try. “I don't want to step on (Jubilee's) toes and I don't want to take any of her limelight,” she says. “But I do know the family that plays together, stays together.”

Of course, she's not running just on being her daughter's

mother. Hirsch is a writer, poet and retired librarian. That's how Nonny Slugswords came to be — she is a granny — Nonny, as her grandkids call her, who “slugs words” around.

For her bribes, she is giving the judges small hand-bound poetry books that feature her original work, including a new poem about the SLUG queen. Hirsch has much experience working with children and teaching art classes in preschools and around the community, and she plans to continue this during her rain. “The things that I enjoy doing most are teaching little kids to do something creative,” she says.



JOANIE KENT, AKA
SITARA T. SLUGSHINE

Joanie Kent, aka Sitara T. Slugshine

Joanie Kent says she believes she was born to be the SLUG queen. In fact, she was born right here in Eugene at PeaceHealth Sacred Heart Medical Center, with a birthmark that looks just like a slug. Also, as the only confirmed wannabe queen with scoliosis, she has a metallic internal shell... as we know, a certain gastropod also has an internal shell.

Her slugsona, Sitara Titanium Slugshine (who is not a boy or a girl, but an elf), was born in a karaoke bar off Highway 99 in 2011 when a friend convinced her to run. While many of the wannabees this year are new to the game, Slugshine is a long seasoned veteran, as this will be her sixth year running for the crown. Her bribe this year was inviting the old queens to paint a large mural with her at the Irving Grange Hall.

Slugshine has seen many incarnations, as every year she gets reborn with a new theme. She has been a Wizard of Oz slug, an Alice in Wonderland slug, and most recently, a Star Trek slug. This year, she will be an Agriculture slug.

Kent intends to give back by “Growing the community, sprouting joy and abundance of friendship and camaraderie in Eugene.” Also, and perhaps most significantly, she has ways of composting that can save slugs without them eating your harvest. This will be her year, she's sure, especially since she's recently gotten her teeth fixed.

“Even my dentist says I need a crown,” she says.

Joi Cardinal, aka Incontinentia Plasterslug

Joi Cardinal is running for SLUG queen because “I have opinions.”

As SLUG queen, they vow to shed visibility on the “invisible affliction of incontinence,” Cardinal says. “Doctors are pretty darn clueless about the best ways to help women, so I would like to raise awareness of them.” Cardinal offers pelvic floor strengthening workshops, where attendees watch videos while making felt purses to “commemorate our bladders.”

Plasterslug also plans to volunteer to make felt beads with kids and teenagers at community events, as it is an easy activity that is “inexpensive and really kinesthetically satisfying for neurodivergent children.”

For the pageant, they bribed the judges by making each of them felt fairies. Cardinal named herself Incontinentia Plasterslug after their personal hero, Cynthia Plaster Caster, a famous groupie in the 1960s who made the most out of an art class assignment to make a plaster cast.

For Plasterslug's talent, they will tell the stories of Plaster Caster — known for her plaster casts of celebrities' erect penises — and two other accomplished women while they felt a stone paperweight. “Telling the stories of remarkable women has been one of my passions for years,” they say.

Why? “Because I think we're the superior sex.”

Panda Bennett, aka PandaSnuggleslug

Panda Bennett works two jobs. She is a professional tarot card reader and a professional cuddler. She has lived in Eugene since 2020, and says it's the only place that's ever truly felt like home. She has become Panda Snuggleslug because “I feel like I'm always just trying to hold space for people and just create cozy hot chocolate Christmas movie vibes for people.”

She says that Snuggleslug is a gastropod who is “big and bold and there to empower other people and inspire them to embrace their weird, authentic, beautiful selves.”

Bennett and her family run a program that helps relocate queer and BIPOC people out of their unsafe spaces, and she plans to promote and continue this during her rain in order to “help our unhoused community and marginalized people in the community achieve safe housing,” she says.

Her bribe is full moon teacup candles. On the last full moon, she poured homemade blackberry sage candles into 26 teacups with the classic design of “old school floral that your grandma had,” all of which are accompanied neatly with a 3D printed fidget slug.

All she would reveal about her talent for the show is that she will be doing “art,” which makes it all the more intriguing.

Ellen Singer, aka Slugelphaba, the Wicked Witch Of Eugene

Ellen Singer is an old hag.

She is also a songwriter and a musician, a creative mind who is passionate about the performing arts, and in love with Eugene's vibrant atmosphere surrounding them.

But she's also an old hag (her words). And she feels at home when she attends live theater and classical concerts because “what I see in the audience is a lot of gray hair,” she says. She's tired of it.

As Slugelphaba, Singer plans on promoting the beauty of performing arts to the young people of Eugene. “These types of things need useful attendance and interest, and I think it's up to our generation to show them how great it is.”

It's not just the beauty that she believes deserves attention from young people, but also all of the hard work that goes into it. “The people who are in these plays are knocking themselves out, and so are the directors and all the other people involved in the theatrical production,” she says.

She plans on bribing the judges with her homegrown raw honey from her beehive, as well as an assortment of freshly picked Oregon berries “because, after all, slugs like berries.”

She seems to plan her rain with such good intentions, so why is she the Wicked Witch of Eugene? “Because wicked witches have more fun than good witches.”

SLUG Queen Pageant and Coronation is 6 pm Friday, August 9, at the downtown Park Blocks at 8th and Oak. The event will begin with music from the One More Time Marching Band, followed by the competition at 6:30 pm.