

Coronation from 1A

clam chowder to each person wearing a 2017 Rhody button through the month of May.

Participating restaurants include ICM Seafood Restaurant, Siuslaw Riverside, Le Bouchon, The Bridgewater, Bay Street Grille, The Beachcomber, The Firehouse and Homegrown Public House.

The idea for the clam chowder discount goes back to the days when clam chowder booths were located along the Rhododendron Festival's parade route.

Past royalty will also return in the form of 1989 Queen Rhododendra Vanessa Buss, who, along with Florence Mayor Joe Henry, will judge the Coronation.

"The Coronation is going to feel a lot like it used to," Krause said. "It's going to be on the main stage of the FEC again."

The night will start with a choreographed music introduction to both the Junior and the Senior Courts. Emcees Krause and Ned Hickson will introduce the sponsors and keep the evening moving.

This is another way the committee is looking at the past — Hickson and Krause emceed together twice before,

and Hickson has emceed three times total.

Krause said one special moment during the Coronation will be when the Junior and Senior Princesses are escorted out to the stage by their father figures during the formal wear event. The Senior Princes will be escorted by their mothers.

"It's going to be so sweet," she said.

For Krause, tradition isn't as important as spending time with the eight Mapleton and Siuslaw high school students of the Senior Court and the five Mapleton and Siuslaw elementary students of the Junior Court.

"It's such a special group," Krause said. "I love this year's court. We've got five (senior) girls who are just dynamic in their own way: achievers who are actively involved in their community and life. The three guys are just amazing and the five Junior Princesses are absolutely adorable."

The Junior Court Princesses are first-grader Clover Holbrook, second-grader Chloe Clark, third-grader Madi Jerabek, fourth-grader AriAnna Williams and fifth-grader Ava Center. Jerabek represents Mapleton, and the other four princesses



PHOTOS BY WENDY KRAUSE

Members of the Rhody Senior Court (above) are building relationships between Siuslaw and Mapleton as they make visits as ambassadors of the area. (Left), rehearsals for the May 18 Coronation allow students to get comfortable on stage.



are from Siuslaw. The Senior Court Princesses are Eya Abbas, Chehalis Stinger, Claire Waggoner, Abby Watkins and Jewel Roby, and the Senior Court Princes are Benjamin Cahoon, Michael Larson and Kyle Doran. Roby and Doran represent Mapleton High School.

According to the Senior Princesses and Princes, there were a lot of reasons to join the Rhody Court this year, including being involved with the community, listening to the advice of friends who went through previous courts, experiencing new facets of Rhody Days, meeting new people, making memories and carrying on tradition.

Waggoner said, "This has a lot of personal meaning to me because my great-grandma was a princess in 1939, and my mom was a princess and Queen Rhododendra in 1990. I am thrilled to now be a part of a 110 year tradition."

Once they were on the court, all members became part of the tradition.

Abbas said, "My favorite part has been the process of building relationships, not only with my fellow seniors, but with people all around the community. Also, I have really enjoyed learning about the history of the festival and parade and knowing I am part of something so historic in this town."

Under the direction of their chaperones, both courts have been visiting retirement homes, area clubs and Coast Radio as ambassadors to the community.

For Doran, the court allows him to use his passion for helping those in need as well as really get to know the community he will leave after graduation.

"I'm really pleased with how they've grown in their public speaking," Krause said. "During this process, we've really seen the students get comfortable on stage, even the shy ones. I'm just very proud of them."

The Senior Court has also gotten to know and mentor the Junior Court while spending time with people who may not attend the same school or have the same interests.

"My favorite part of being on the court has been meeting all of the wonderful people," Larson said. "I have made so many lasting connections that I will never forget. These people include the other members of the court, those running the court and all of the people we go and visit."

Stinger echoed this. "Being on the Rhody Court has been a family tradition, and I am honored to continue in the tradition. I'm getting to know the Mapleton royalty

and working with the Junior Court," she said.

For Cahoon, all of his experiences his senior year at Mapleton are "an amazing addition to his story."

"I'm an artist, and I let that rule my life. Meaning, I strive to make every aspect of my life artwork pleasing to God," he said.

Talent is another big part of the Coronation.

Krause said, "We've got some amazing talent. Oh my goodness, the talent portion is going to be so fun this year. From dancing and singing to a heartfelt story to knife throwing to card tricks and music - it's going to be so fun."

Roby is the first knife thrower in Rhody history.

"It makes me unique," she said.

Archery used to be part of the agility contest to become Queen Rhododendra, a practice that has fallen out of use in the past 70 or more years.

"This is one more way we're hearkening back," Krause said.

Watkins also plans to showcase her athleticism with a gymnastics and dance routine.

Each of the Senior Court royalty has plans for after high school, from enlisting in the military to going to college. Many also plan to continue their community involvement in sports, the arts and more.

At less than a week away, the entire community is getting "ready to rhody" by putting bright, hand-painted rhododendrons up in windows. It is another fundraiser for Senior Court scholarships and a way to show support for the Rhododendron Festival next weekend, May 19-21.

"The goal of painting rhodies on windows is just to get excitement about Rhody Weekend before it hits," Krause said. "It's our first year, and we hope to grow on that in the future and get the whole town blooming with rhodies on their windows."

The Rhody Court Committee will continue "painting the town in rhodies" through Rhody Days, Krause said. Any time there is blue sky, she and her team will step out and paint more rhodies on windows.

"Businesses are really excited about having those rhodies on the windows. They feel like they get to be part of the team and community. They're banding together with us to promote Rhody Weekend," Krause said.

The Rhody Court Committee invites people to attend Thursday's Coronation.

"These kids are amazing," Krause said again of her students. "There are always the impressive ones, the ones who impress you and shine when you don't expect it. These kids are it."

After the Coronation, the entire Rhody Court will appear in the Grand Floral Parade on Sunday, May 21, on a float sponsored by Banner Bank.

The Junior Court will also appear in the Junior Parade on Saturday, May 20.

The 2017 Rhododendron Festival buttons can be purchased from any of the Rhododendron Court members, from their button boxes found at businesses in Florence, and at the Chamber of Commerce Visitor's Center, 290 Highway 101.

For more information on the 2017 Rhododendron Festival, visit www.florencechamber.com/annual-events/rhody-festival.

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