

RHODY COURT PREPARES FOR MAY 17 CORONATION, FESTIVAL WEEKEND

By CHANTELE MEYER
SIUSLAW NEWS

The members of this year's Rhododendron Court are ready to "Rhody Rendezvous" with the Florence community during the Coronation on Thursday, May 17. Beginning at 6:30 p.m., the Junior and Senior Royal Courts will share their talents, interviews and insights at the stage of the Florence Events Center, 715 Quince St. To conclude the event, one Senior Princess and Prince will be crowned Queen Rhododendra and King of the Coast.

"These awesome ambassadors for the 111th Rhododendron Festival have been working so hard," said Rhody Court Committee Chair Jenna Bartlett.

Students from Siuslaw and Mapleton elementary and high schools have been attending events, making connections and representing the Florence area since they were selected to be on the court.

Court members are still selling campaign-style pins for \$3 featuring the festival's logo. Pins are available from court members, at the Florence Area Chamber of Commerce Visitor's Center, 290 Highway 101, and around town. Proceeds go toward scholarships for members of the court.

Pins are also good for \$1 off a bowl of chowder at participating restaurants in May. The list includes Bay Street Grille, Beachcomber Pub, Firehouse Restaurant, Homegrown Public House, ICM Restaurant and Le Bouchon Café.

Florence Area Chamber of Commerce sponsors the annual festival and the Rhododendron Court.

"This year's 'Rhody Rendezvous' theme intends to evoke a feeling of coming to Florence and meeting up with friends and family for a great time here in Oregon's Coastal Playground," said Chamber Executive Director

Bettina Hannigan.

The "rendezvous" theme will be apparent throughout the Coronation as the Rhody Court honors 111 years of tradition as Florence's longest-running festival and the West Coast's third oldest flower festival.

By uniting new elements with old, and combining community organizations with festival traditions, the 2018 Rhody Court Coronation will bring a whole new style to the annual showcase.

This year will include performances by CROW's (Children's Repertory of Oregon Workshops) Flight Dance Team.

The masters of ceremonies will be Ned and Alicia Hickson, who will introduce the court, interview the Senior Princesses and Princes and keep the audience entertained.

Ned has emceed the Rhody Court Coronation four previous times, but committee members thought it was time to bring Alicia onstage to join him.

"Meeting each other was the best rendezvous of our lives," Ned said. "We decided it would be fun to host together."

The Hicksons have previously acted together in the Holly Jolly Follies.

Judges for the coronation will be Florence Mayor Joe Henry, Florence First Citizen Rachel Pearson, past Queen Rhododendra Kay Robertson, Coast Radio host Wayne Sharpe and honorary judge Diane Conlee. They will score the Senior Courts on several aspects of the evening, such as the talent and interview portions. Scoring will also take into account participation

and button sales.

Seven Siuslaw High School students make up the Senior Court this year. Princesses are Thelma Gentry, Lainey Goss, Alex Saindon, Andrea Sanchez and Denielle VanWinkle. The two princes are Trent Reavis and Colby Waters.



PHOTO COURTESY THE RHODODENDRON COURT COMMITTEE

The Junior Court is comprised of Mapleton third-grader Abigail Galvan Mendez and first-grader Aleeya Thomas, second-grader Jasmine Krause, fourth-grader Kylee Stinger and fifth-grader Brittney Adams, all from Siuslaw.

"I wanted to be a Rhododendron Princess because it is something that always interested me," Gentry said. "It will also get me out of my comfort zone."

She dances ballet, and she recently performed a number in the Spring Dance Showcase. She also enjoys pottery, singing and her pets. After graduation, she plans to attend Oregon State University's (OSU) veterinary program.

Goss said she joined the court this year "because I am passionate about my community and would love the chance to be involved in this tradition. ... I am

incredibly grateful to have grown up in such a wonderful, supportive community and look forward to contributing to its history."

She is active in several sports, volunteer clubs and academic groups, and is a student leader, photographer and artist. After graduation, she plans to attend OSU to study biohealth science.

For Saindon, joining the court is stepping into a family legacy that both her parents started. For several years, her parents assisted with the Rhody Court, allowing Saindon the chance to interact with community ambassadors firsthand.

"In the end, they became people that I looked up to," she said. "I have always wanted to be that person for the little Junior Princesses, and becoming a Senior Court Princess helps me fulfill that dream."

Saindon is a student leader and volunteer who has been involved with CROW and theater. After graduation, she plans to pursue a career in the beauty industry.

Sanchez-Hernandez said, "I want to use this opportunity as a way of closing a chapter in my life. Florence has been my home since I can remember — and what would be a better send off than participating in something so traditional to my hometown?"

She sings in choir, is a student leader and enjoys working in group settings. After graduation, she plans to dual enroll at OSU and Linn-Benton Community College to study business and receive her real estate license.

VanWinkle has been a part of the Florence community since 2015. In

that time, she has been involved with volunteer groups, two jobs and her family, including her niece.

"When I lived in Kansas, I participated in Little Miss Rose Hill. Although I love Oregon, I am excited to continue participating in events like I used to. I also get to work with the younger princesses, and I absolutely love children," she said.

After graduation, VanWinkle plans to get certified in American Sign Language and eventually pursue a career in speech pathology. In the meantime, she will study to become a certified dental assistant.

The two Rhody Princes, Reavis and Waters, also have their own reasons for joining the 2018 Court.

Reavis is a legacy, as both his sister and grandmother were previously crowned Queen Rhododendra.

"Being part of the Rhody Court will not only help me attend college and further my academic and athletic career, it will give me an opportunity to make my family proud and follow their footsteps," he said.

Reavis is a three-sport athlete and student leader. After graduation, he plans to study sports medicine and exercise science.

Waters said, "I feel my attitude and leadership can set a great example for my peers. I want to show how exciting the future is and how important it is to feel happy with what you've achieved and have the strength to move on, set goals and do great things. I hope to share my dreams and successes with the community as a whole."

He enjoys athletics and playing piano, as well as game design and technology. After graduation, he plans to major in clinical psychology and visual communications.

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