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People can expect a mix of tradition and new things, just like with every celebration of the Rhododendron Festival. In this case, "Coastal Canvas" helps show off the students' artistry — paired with Children's Repertory of Oregon Workshops' (CROW) Flight Dance Team — while beautiful living rhododendrons help decorate the stage. Mike Bones and Bones Nursery donated the rhododendrons, and Gene Cochran again will

provide the rhododendrons for Queen Rhododendra's bouquet, which will be designed by Florence in Bloom. A highlight of the coronation is the tradition of crowning the historic titles of Queen Rhododendra and King of the Coast, a more recent addition. The entire Senior Court will receive scholarships from money raised from their community sponsors, tickets for the event and the sales of this year's festival pin.

"I love this year's court,"

said Rhody Court Advisor Wendy Krause. "Not only do we have seven senior girls and two senior guys, but they are so unique and diverse. They each bring something very special to the table. My heart is just filled with gratitude for them. And I feel the same about our Junior Court."

During the Coronation, the community will get to meet the eight Junior Court Princesses, with students from both Mapleton and Siuslaw school districts. This year's Siuslaw princesses are first-graders KayDee Butler and Adrienna Sneddon, second-grader Addison Ott, fourth-grader Abigail Stevenson and fifth-graders Daisy Robledo and Cheyanne Wiesner. The Mapleton princesses are third-graders Noah Williams and Payton Halvserson.

So why would eight little girls decide to participate in a months-long commitment?

"I love my town and the rhododendron tradition," said KayDee. "Princesses help people and animals."

Daisy said, "I want to prove I'm a leader and can show respect to my elders and be

and even has her own listing on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb).

and represent my hometown." Adrienna said she wants to learn new things, help people in her town and make people happy. "I want to show people to be kind, because I want to be like Queen Lainey," she said, thanking 2018 Queen Rhododendra Lainey Goss.

For Noah, who lives all the way in Deadwood, being on the Rhody Court is a dream come true. "I have dreamt of being a princess my whole life," she said. "To me, princesses are really lucky and always beautiful. I would love to feel like a princess for even one day."

Many of the girls have always wanted to be involved in the festival.

"I go to every parade in Florence," Payton said, "and sometimes I see my friends on a float and I dreamed about it."

To Abigail, it's another chance to perform, like she does in CROW and dance. For Addison, being on the court has been fun and a chance to meet new people. Cheyanne said she likes dressing up and participating.

The Junior Court will be interacting with the Senior Court onstage, as well as answering interview questions from Coronation masters of ceremonies Ned and Alicia Hickson.

The 2019 Senior Court consists of seven Senior Princesses and two Senior Princes, all seniors at Siuslaw High School. These are princesses Falon Borgnino, Hope Garcia, Heaven Lewis, Madison Reynolds, Ella Stidham, Aylene Vazquez and Marissa Wells and princes Tim Lowder and Patrick Rowley.

This gifted group has prepared a variety of talents for the skill portion of the evening.

In keeping with the "Coastal Canvas" theme, Falon is a photographer who loves exploring the outdoors and trying new things.

"I love capturing the natural beauty of others and also moments hidden in pictures that leave some wondering," she said. "My dream is to travel to many different places in the world to explore and take photos of it all. My goal is to become a professional photographer and open my own coffee stand, like my parents."

Falon is sponsored by Dutch Bros. Coffee in Florence, which is owned by her parents.

Hope is also an artist, this time with acting. She has performed on stage and in film

and even has her own listing on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb). "It's funny because when people hear that my passion is acting, it surprised them because I'm so shy and quiet most of the time," Hope said. "But when I'm on set, I become the character I'm playing and can deliver the performance with total confidence."

She hopes to attend film school and has been accepted into a New York Film Academy training intensive this summer.

A third artist on the court is Heaven, a singer with a big voice and a big personality, which she hopes to show off with her talent.

"I aspire to be a leader, and that is what a princess or queen is. I love working with other people, and just genuinely caring for others," she said. Heaven works and volunteers in the community, which she hopes will help her plan out her life.

"I am 18 years old and I have my whole life ahead of me," she said, "I am interested in many different things for my future."

The fourth princess is Madison, who joined the court to join tradition and start working on her goals.

"I want to become more involved in the Florence community and connected with the history of Florence," she said. "One of the most appealing parts of being on the Rhody Court is the wonderful opportunity to work with all the younger members of the court and mentor one of the elementary princesses."

She wants to work with children and plans to double major in education and health and human services.

"This dream has motivated me to always try my best," she added.

For Ella, it doesn't take experimentation to guess why she wanted to join the court. This future chemical engineering major is following her grandmother Anita Petersen's footsteps in being on the court.

"I feel that being a part of Rhody Court will immerse myself more into the community," Ella said. "I want to have that moment where the whole town recognizes the hard work put in by students to bring the schools and community closer together."

Besides prepping for college, she sings in choir, volunteers and helps others.

The senior members of the court also dreamed of being on the court since they were young.

"Growing up as a kid, I dreamed of becoming a Rhody Princess," Aylene said. "I moved to Florence just before my kindergarten year and quickly fell in love with the community. I love how many traditions Florence has."

The experience has helped her be more involved in the community before graduation. She also is plugged into sports, Rotary Interact and her family.

"After high school, I plan on doing a short-term exchange program in Spain through Rotary," Aylene said. "After I return, I will pursue my dream of becoming a professional cosmetologist."

The Florence community is a motivator for several of the seniors.

Tim said, "I wanted to be a Rhododendron Prince because it would be an amazing opportunity to become a contributing member of the community" — not that he needs more help with that.

Thanks to motivation from his twin Audrey, he joined Interact this year. He also has worked to improve his grades and learn guitar.

"When I grow up, I dream of being a state trooper and family man. I plan to get there by joining the military after graduation to give me many life skills and serve my country," he said. For Marissa, the Rhododendron Court is a chance to show skills she has perfected in working with her dog, River, and to get ready for life after high school.

"I believe that the Rhododendron Festival is a big part of what makes Florence so special," she said. "I was born and raised here and have always been proud to be a part of the community here. Rhody days is not only a tradition for Florence, but a tradition for my family."

For Patrick, the Coronation is more than a chance to hold the audience spellbound with his voice — it's a chance to honor those who have helped him gain confidence, perfect his range and find who he is. He has used his time as a Senior Prince as an opportunity to grow as a leader and bond with his peers.

Maybe Marissa said it best when she said, "I feel as if this Florence holiday is a big part of me and who I am."

To learn more about the 2019 Rhododendron Festival Court, come to the Florence Events Center tonight for talent, fun, history and the coronation of Queen Rhododendra and King of the Coast.

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