

Madison High School princess cherishes Tongan heritage, traditions

By Maileen Hamo
The Asian Reporter

Mele Kavapalu, Madison High School's Rose Festival princess, considers family, faith, and community central to her life of service. To celebrate being named to the 2017 Portland Rose Festival Court, Mele chose to honor her church and family, in an act of gratitude for their unconditional support.

"Being a Pacific Islander, I celebrate my ethnicity by involving myself in church gatherings, performances, singing, and dancing," she said. "I gave [our reverend] one of the bouquets of flowers I received from one of my Rose Festival Court representatives."

In pure Mele fashion, the celebration concluded with more giving: She went on to practice with church members for the congregation's annual celebration.

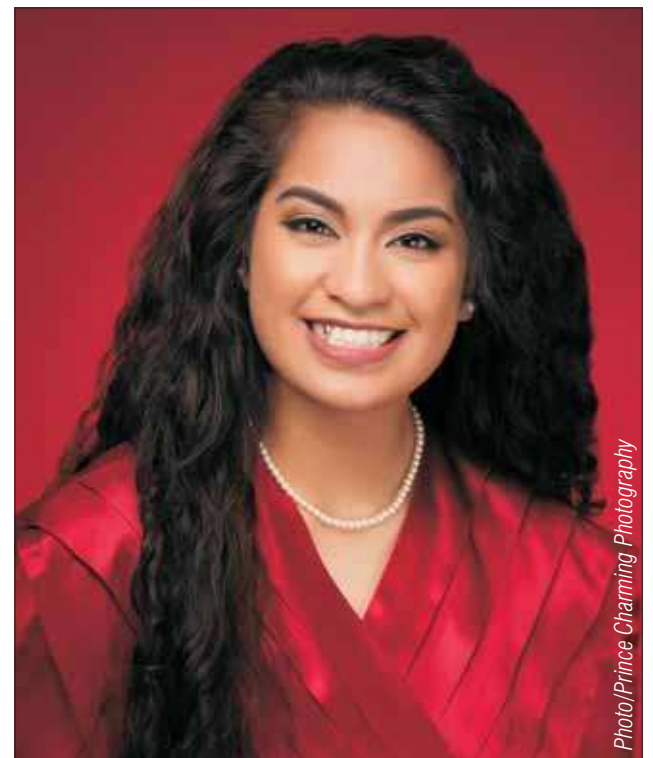
As a Portlander who is deeply immersed in her Tongan culture, Mele relishes the opportunity to educate others about traditions on the islands. She said she is most proud of the great familial bond among Tongans as they maintain a close connection to the culture that nurtures the Polynesian community on the mainland.

"In the Tongan community, we cherish the value of respect. Wherever you go on the islands, there is always a welcoming smile or random gesture of a food offering from the people," Mele said. "I also love how the culture is alive during celebrations that include delicious food, skillful dancing, and the sensational home vibe."

Mele's journey to become Madison's Rose Festival representative started her freshman year, when she was recognized as the "Most Likely to Become a Rose Festival Princess" by her classmates. Her successful run was inspired by Abigail Reyes Santiago, Madison's 2016 princess.

"I heard the program would offer once-in-a-lifetime opportunities and I wanted to add diversity to the list of names of Madison princesses, along with Abigail," said Mele.

"After all, our school is one of the most diverse schools in



TONGAN PRIDE. Mele Kavapalu rides a carousel in Seaside, Oregon during an outing with this year's Rose Festival Court. Kavapalu, who considers family, faith, and community central to her life of service, is excited to represent the Polynesian community in one of Portland's most vibrant and enduring institutions. The Portland Rose Festival's Queen's Coronation takes place Saturday, June 10 at Portland's Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

College Possible, and Gear UP. She also plays for her school's symphonic band.

For Mele, her achievements in volleyball trump all others. She was awarded the honor of "Most Spirit" in 2013 as a freshman and earned the "Most Inspirational Award" as a senior. This past season, she was also team captain and received all-league honorable mention in varsity volleyball.

Continued on page 16

the city. When senior year came around, I told myself, 'why not?'"

Mele's achievements at Madison are well rounded — from sports to community service, from music to academics. She serves as president of the Madison student body and volunteers for Madison Red Cross,



Need a good doctor?
CareOregon has thousands.



yourwholehealth.com