

Beauty Pageants

Art is life for pageant winner

By DAVE BROCKMANN
Sentinel staff writer

WHEN SHE was a freshman at Watsonville High, school just wasn't that important. Her grades were average at best.

Not long after, Rebeca Ventura was introduced to the arts and that's when her magical journey began.

"The arts gave me the opportunity to improve on everything," said the 17-year-old senior, who, to her surprise, was crowned Saturday night as Miss Santa Cruz County. "The arts opened the door for me, and now I'm interested in academics, school activities and being part of the community."

She's worked with the St. Francis Young Actors Guild and Father Jesse at the Penny Club; she played Peter Pan in last year's very successful high school "Peter Pan" production; and the year

before, starred as Maria in "West Side Story."

And, when she hasn't been performing, Ventura has spent her free time involving herself in the Model U.N. program, the drama club, running on the cross country team and working as a volunteer on the political campaign for City Councilman Oscar Rios.

Ventura is the youngest of six siblings. Her father Leon came to the U.S. from Mexico when he was 16 and worked in the fields. Today, at 62, he's a vice president with Dole in Salinas.

Leon and Luz Ventura, unfortunately, didn't get to share in the joy and excitement of the crowning moment. The harvesting season is well under way in Yuma, Ariz., and that's where business took Leon.

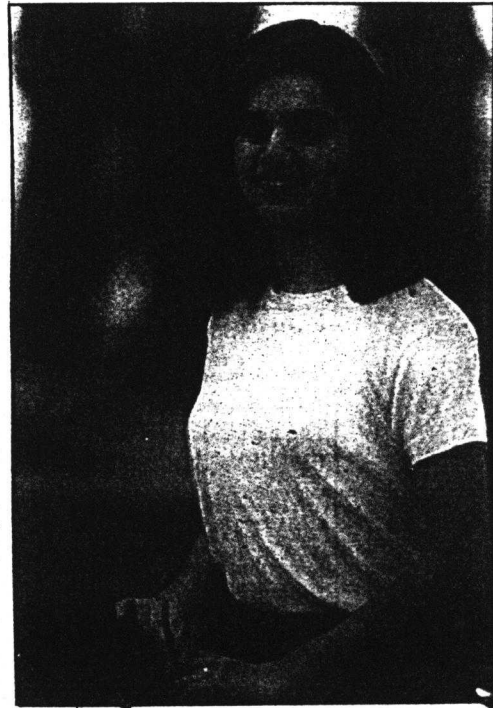
"I entered (Miss Santa Cruz County pageant) because my vocal teacher said it would be a wonderful experience and she said it would improve my

self-confidence," said Ventura, who is applying to UCLA's Theater Arts Department. "I learned how to prepare myself for an interview and how to present myself."

It was like a dream, she said, when the crown was placed on her head after performing the song "Think of Me" from the musical "Phantom of the Opera."

Ventura receives a \$1,000 scholarship toward her college education and will represent the county in the Miss California Pageant June 22 in Fresno. The winner of that contest will represent California in the Miss America Pageant later this year.

Words of advice for others from Ventura: "I would tell young ladies that they should open their minds to as many experiences as they can, not only the arts and music, but academics and sports. I feel if someone gains confidence in one thing, they'll have confidence to accomplish anything in life."



17-year-old Rebeca Ventura, a senior at Watsonville High, was crowned Miss Santa Cruz County Saturday night.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

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