

Miss Santa Cruz County gets crowned

By **CATHY REDFERN**

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

The crown has been passed. In a contest that started as Miss Watsonville in 1947, Shannon Birt became Miss Santa Cruz County on Sunday night at an event now called a scholarship program.

Birt, a 21-year-old San Jose State University student, will receive a \$3,000 scholarship, plus the opportunity to promote a cause important to her — breast cancer awareness.

Birt has a close family friend and an aunt who have had breast cancer, she said.

"I'm extremely, extremely thrilled to have been given this opportunity to work with this program and prepare for Miss California," said Birt, who lives in Soquel and plans to become a teacher.

The pageant has been held in the spring for many years, at various places in the county.

It was held in fall this year to give Miss Santa Cruz County more time to prepare for the Miss California competition in July, said Deborah Maddock Elston, co-executive director of the board of the Santa Cruz County Scholarship Program.

The event was held at Park Hall in Ben Lomond, and the 180 tickets

were sold out, Elston said.

Tickets are not sold at the door, partly in response to the disruptive protests of the 1980s by those who felt the former beauty pageant degraded women.

The crown was transferred from Kristina Harris, who won the 2001 crown in February and promoted early detection of scoliosis during her reign, Elston said.

Harris placed in the top 10 in July's Miss California competition, she said.

"She accomplished a lot in a short period of time," Elston said.

The "platform" aspect of the contest was added in recent years to modernize the program, Elston said. Scholarships were added in the 1960s.

Birt competed against seven other young women. They were judged by their verbal interviewing skills (which counted for 40 percent of their scores), displays of talent (30 percent) and modeling of an evening gown and a swimsuit (15 percent each).

"They are very special girls," Elston said. "We get attached to all of them. They are all winners."

Miss California competitions were held at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk for many years.

Contact Cathy Redfern at credfern@santa-cruz.com.

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SHANNON BIRT,

MISS SANTA CRUZ COUNTY, 2002



Contributed photo

Shannon Birt, 21, a San Jose State University student, was crowned Miss Santa Cruz County on Sunday.

EVERYONE'S A WINNER

Winners of the 2002 Santa Cruz County Scholarship Program winners are as follows:

■ Miss Santa Cruz County: Shannon Birt, 21, of Soquel, \$3,000;

■ First runner-up: Carissa White, 22, of Santa Cruz, \$1,000;

■ Second runner-up: Jami Smith, 23, a UC Santa Cruz student, \$700;

■ Kelly Chilcote Memorial Scholarship: Laicey Shoemate, 17, a Harbor High School student, \$500;

■ Dick Brandberg Community Service Award: Shannon Birt, \$250;

■ Josephine Ware Honorary Talent Award: Francine Mesa, 19, a Cabrillo College student, for a Tahitian dance, \$250;

■ Miss Congeniality: Carissa White, \$200; and

■ Honorary Interview: Laicey Shoemate, \$100.

All non-finalists received \$500 for competing.