



Dave Brooks/Register-Pajaronian

Stacey Osborn (center) was named Miss Santa Cruz County 2004 Sunday during an afternoon ceremony at the Mello Center in Watsonville. Also pictured are Jennifer Crawford (from left), Ruth Gonzalez, Laura Bookman and Lauren Bjorgan.

Miss Santa Cruz County goes Broadway

Studious Soquel resident Stacey Osborn takes home this year's crown

By DAVE BROOKS

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

If you've made it on Broadway, you've really made it.

The Mello Center in Watsonville was transformed into 42nd Street and Broadway Sunday during a New York-style competition for the 2004 Miss Santa Cruz County title. Five young women competed in the variety-show-like event, complete with musical numbers, vaudeville dance routines and Tony award-worthy performances. The only thing missing from the Manhattan-like set were a few gypsy pickpockets and a squeegee man.

Whiz kid Stacey Osborn of Soquel took home this year's crown. Osborn attended Harbor High School and graduated when she was 16. At age 19, she received her bachelor's degree from California

"All the girls did fantastic, and I was completely shocked that I had won."

— Stacy Osborn, Miss Santa Cruz County 2004

State University Stanislaus and is currently enrolled in the master's program at San Jose State University. She studies administrative justice/criminology and hopes to one day work for the FBI or the CIA. She is also studying Arabic.

"I feel absolutely wonderful," Osborn said. "All the girls did fan-

tastic, and I was completely shocked that I had won."

Osborn was crowned by Miss Santa Cruz County 2003 Janie Oliver after a flurry of musical numbers including "Thoroughly Modern Millie," which was sung by Oliver with dance accompaniment by the five contestants. Each contestant also chose vocal performance as their talent exhibition. Osborn sang "Ain't Misbehavin'" as her piece.

Osborn said the hardest part of the competition was the dance routines. "This pageant includes two months of dancing, and I am an awful dancer and (choreographer Andrew Roubal) had a field day with me," she said. "I haven't danced since I was 6, so I couldn't even kick above my waist."

CONTEST

From page 1

Lenora Barnett, Osborn's maternal grandmother, said she was overcome with joy. "I'm just thrilled to death. Everybody is here. Her whole family, all her relatives came," she said.

Friend Christine Laus, a runner-up in last year's event, said she cried with tears of joy after Osborn won. "I've known her since sixth grade," Laus said about the pair's New Brighton Middle School days. "We would go after school and walk to the doughnut shop everyday and have doughnuts and put it on her parents' tab. We were all about the chocolate bars."

Miss Santa Cruz County 1996 Valerie LaFrance was also on hand for Sunday's ceremony. "It's amazing to be here because I still feel so excited for them as if I was actually running," she said. "My advice to Miss Santa Cruz County is to enjoy each moment, take it all in and have fun with it."

Osborn will now go on to compete in the Miss California competition. If she wins, she'll go to Atlantic City where she'll compete in the Miss America Pageant.

LaFrance said the competition at the state level is fierce. "Miss California is amazing. When you get to the state, there's so many different levels," she said. "The most surprising thing is that there are a lot of young women out there who will do whatever it takes to win."

Santa Cruz County has been involved in the Miss America program since the 1920s, but the relationship hasn't always been smooth. The Miss California Competition originated in Santa Cruz in 1924 as a publicity stunt by Santa Cruz Boardwalk founder Fred Swanton. The event was characterized for its circus-like status, and a delegation of Ku Klux Klan members even showed up to try and spoil the fun. Alameda's Faye Lamphier took home the crown that year, but was lambasted by publishing tyrant William Randolph Hearst who called her a phony and asked her how she could be a bathing beauty without knowing how to swim.

The city of Watsonville refused to participate and called the event a waste of money. Protestors dubbed the Miss California event everything from immoral to sexist, but the event continued to push forward

a waste of money. Protestors dubbed the Miss California event everything from immoral to sexist, but the event continued to push forward.

Opposition to the event reached its peak during the mid-1980s after activist Ann Simonton wore a dress made of meat to the competition to protest Miss California's portrayal of females. The last straw came in 1985 when women's rights activists collected vials of blood from rape victims and poured their contents on the entrance to the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium where the event was held.

The competition was moved to San Diego, but Santa Cruz would still get one more jab at the pageant. In 1988, Michelle Anderson was crowned Miss Santa Cruz County but lost the title at the Miss California competition after she pulled a banner out of her top that denounced pageants.

The protest brought about change in the competition, and pageant promoters began to market the event as a scholarship program that provided money for girls to go to college. Since 1996, the Miss Santa Cruz County competition has given out \$68,850 to participants. Osborn will take home at least \$4,000 for her crown, and all the girls who participate walk away with at least \$500 for school.

Janice Allegri, deputy field director for Miss California Pageant, said there's still a lot of misconceptions out there.

"A lot of people think it's a beauty pageant," Allegri said. "Yes, there is internal beauty as well as outward beauty, but the interview portion of the competition is 40 percent and the talent portion is 30 percent. Only 10 percent of the points are for appearance and another 10 percent is for physical fitness."

She said the program boosts the girls' self esteem and helps them develop into well-rounded women. "They not only have an opportunity to win scholarships for their educational goals, it also helps them build character and confidence," she said.

Competitor Ruth Gonzalez said she was happy that she participated in the event. "I had a blast," she said. "This experience has been absolutely wonderful."