



Amanda Schoenberg/Register-Pajaronian

Danielle Crook celebrates Sunday after being crowned Miss Santa Cruz County 2007 at the Cabrillo College Theater in Aptos.

Local tops pageant

✓ *Beauty Pageants*
Aptos native Danielle Crook named Miss Santa Cruz County

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APTOS — After performing a dramatic operatic number, answering tough questions and showing off her poise in an evening gown, Danielle Crook of Aptos was crowned Miss Santa Cruz County Sunday at the Cabrillo College Theater.

Along with the honor, Crook, 23, earned a \$5,000 scholarship and will head to the California Scholarship Program in Fresno, where she will compete against winners from across the state in June.

Katelyn Marie Bruce, 21, a student at the University of California at Santa Cruz, was crowned first

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Ruth Gonzalez, Miss Santa Cruz County 2006, pins the crown on 2007 Santa Cruz County Outstanding Teen Jessica Metter Sunday afternoon at the Cabrillo College Theater.

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runner-up in the competition and received a \$1,800 scholarship. Cabrillo College student Jennifer Borba Castro, 20, was named second runner-up and awarded a \$1,300 scholarship. Miss Congeniality Willow Star Faygenholtz, 18, a Cabrillo College student, received a \$200 scholarship and all non-finalist contestants, including Faygenholtz, Brianna Marie Lehmann, Lauren Swanson and Tegan Alexandra Dixon received \$600 for participating in the competition. Fagenholtz, Dixon and Castro also received additional special awards ranging from \$250 to \$500.

The contestants were judged on a private interview, talent, appearance and poise in eveningwear, on-stage questions and lifestyle/physical fitness.

Crook, who was swarmed after the competition by cheering students from Aptos High, where she works as choral director, began taking vocal lessons at the age of 14. Her mother, Marilyn Schultz, added that she had been matching pitch since the age of 2.

"It's exciting," Schultz said. "She's always wanted to be Miss Santa Cruz County. It was great to see her resolve."

As Miss Santa Cruz County, Crook plans to work for suicide awareness and prevention. Since her father's death three years ago, Crook said she has been determined to raise awareness about depression and suicide prevention.

"There is a lot that people need to be made aware of," she said. "Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among adults."

For the first time this year, the competition also featured the crowning of the 2007 Santa Cruz County Outstanding Teen, Jessica Meeter, a dancer and junior at Santa Cruz High School. Other Outstanding Teen contestants included Kylie Kucinski, Nataliya Munishkina and Leilani Victor.

For Miss Santa Cruz County 2006 Ruth Gonzalez, who has spent the past year raising awareness about Celiac Disease, watching this year's contestants prepare was inspiring.

"It was really exciting — I real-

ly see myself in them," she said.

The local competition has been going strong since 1924, distributing \$105,000 in educational scholarships and prizes in the last 12 years. In addition to performances from the contestants, the competition also featured two operatic solos by Gonzalez, entertainment from Shuffles Dance Studio Dancers, Elaine's Dance Studio Dancers, dancer and choreographer Andrew Roubal and singers Dr. John Newman and Debbie DiMaggio.