

Pageant moving to San Diego

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The Miss California Pageant — which had its beginnings on the Santa Cruz Boardwalk in 1924 and has taken place in that city every year since — is moving.

The National Miss America Board of Directors for the first time in 62 years has awarded the franchise for the Miss California Pageant to bidders in San Diego.

The move will take the pageant from its birthplace to a more modern auditorium better equipped to accommodate television crews and the growing number of participants, said Charlotte Randolph of Santa Cruz, who chairs the Miss California Pageant.

The need for a better auditorium is the main reason behind the move, Randolph said, but the growing local opposition and rowdy demonstrations contributed to the decision to move

from Santa Cruz.

Workers had to begin improving the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium two to three weeks before the pageant. The pageant required a bigger stage, a ramp, and sophisticated sound and light systems. Costs of bringing these improvements to the auditorium ran into thousands of dollars, Randolph said.

"It's a huge undertaking," she said. "This auditorium was not built for television. The lighting is our biggest expense."

The growing number of participants has also made the auditorium unsuitable. The number of towns and cities, particularly those in Southern California, that want to send participants to the Miss California Pageant has continued to increase, Randolph said. Last year, 40 contestants from regions throughout California took part. Their numbers strained the auditorium to its limit, Randolph said.

The pageant could also sell a lot more tickets than the 1,400 that are available once a ramp and orchestra box have been installed in the auditorium, Randolph said.

Increasingly larger protests against the pageant also influenced the national directors, Randolph said.

Though locals were becoming familiar with the counter-pageant protest that became known as "Myth California," out-of-town participants and their supporters were taken aback by the protests.

In 1984, protestors flung raw meat on stage during the bathing suit competition. Last year almost 1,000 protestors gathered outside the auditorium. They included several women, one dressed in skirt steaks, who threw what they claimed was human blood on the auditorium steps.

"For people coming into Santa Cruz for the first time to a pageant, I think they were

probably a little amazed coming into the auditorium," Randolph said.

Randolph, who has been involved in the Miss California Pageant for 20 years, ever since her daughter was crowned Miss San Joaquin County, said about the pageant's move, "I think we all have mixed feelings. It's the end of an era here in Santa Cruz."

Many homes and restaurants hold pageant memorabilia, collections of old program books and pictures of Lee Meriwether, the most famous of the six Miss Californias who went on to become Miss America, Randolph said.

Meriwether was selected in 1955 and became the first Miss America to be crowned on national television.

Local officials expressed mixed feelings about the pageant's move, as well.

"It's really too bad," Santa

Cruz Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt said, "because we tried very hard to do everything in our power to create a situation where pageant participants could feel safe and secure, and the rights of demonstrators could be protected, too."

The city paid \$6,000 to hire off-duty sheriff's deputies to ensure safety during the pageant.

Wormhoudt said the pageant's move was a sign the event had "outgrown" the city since "TV has become a big factor and the number of participants has grown."

"There is a need for a good performing arts center and we are doing something about it," Wormhoudt said, referring to a study of ways to improve the Civic Auditorium.

Representatives of local business regret the money they will lose along with the pageant.

Each contestant and her entourage of 10 to 20 people stayed in Santa Cruz the week before the pageant, Lionel Stoloff, general manager of the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce, said.

"They're all using hotel rooms. They're taking their meals out. They're walking on the mall spending their money," Stoloff said.

The program was telecast throughout California and Nevada, he said, adding, "You're getting free commercials. They're doing overhead shots of the beach and boardwalk."

Many people come to Santa Cruz for the pageant and decide to return for vacations, as well, Stoloff said.

"I don't know how you measure that," he said.

REFERENCE