

Extra Credit!

Four McQuaid Jesuit High School seniors have been selected as finalists in the National Merit Scholarship Program. In addition, two other McQ seniors have qualified as finalists in the National Achievement Scholarship Program.

Kevin Buell, Zachary Nowak, Michael Pitunaro and Michael Snyder are National Merit Scholarship finalists. Damien DeLauney and Nathaniel Sheppard are Achievement Scholarship finalists. All six students will be honored for their academic achievements during McQuaid's honors assembly in May.

St. Ann's School, Hornell recently staged a science fair for students in grades 4-8. The event was held as part of Catholic Schools Week and included judging by area high-school and college instructors.

First-place finishers were: fourth grade - Peter McDaniels; fifth grade - Lisa Marino, Nena Armeli and Jenna Price; sixth grade - Kevin O'Connor, Michael Beckerman and Tom Logan; seventh grade - Michael Balducci; and eighth grade - Rosanna DiRaimondo, Shannon Valentine and Hannah Page.

Two Bishop Kearney High School students, who both serve as organizers of student blood drives at BK, recently attended an American Red Cross workshop.

Senior Renee Schaefer and junior Chandra Rivers, along with school nurse Elizabeth McIntosh, took part in the one-day event.

Personality propels teen to state title

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

BRIGHTON — The way Alyssa Stephany tells it, you would think she didn't stand a chance in this pageant.

"I was really not even coached for this. I was happy just to be one of the 22 finalists," Alyssa said of her first trip to the New York State Junior Miss contest.

Furthermore, Alyssa experienced difficulty following normal procedure once competition began. Because of her cheery, energetic personality, she struggled with the policy about maintaining "proper" posture and poise while interviewing with judges.

"I just started talking with my hands," she explained with a laugh. "But I guess they liked it."

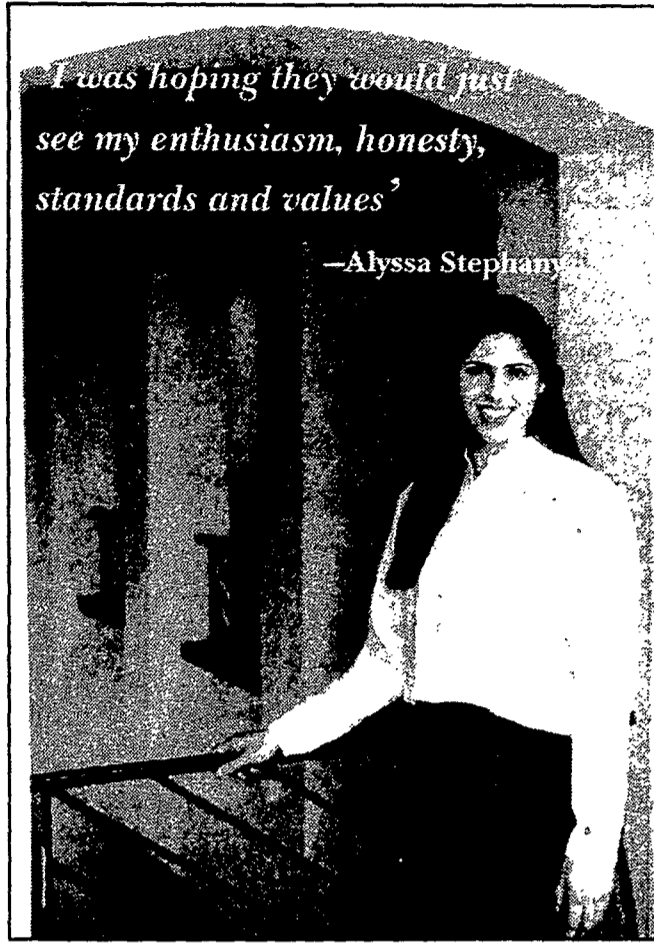
That's a pretty safe guess on Alyssa's part. When all the ballots had been turned in, the 17-year-old Our Lady of Mercy High School senior had been selected as state Junior Miss champion.

The weeklong pageant, held in Whitehall, N.Y., culminated with Alyssa's crowning on Saturday, Feb. 25. Her winning performance was based on academics, interviews, creative performing arts, fitness, presence and composure.

Alyssa, a 97-average student ranked No. 2 in her class, noted that the Junior Miss competition "wasn't a beauty pageant. It was something that took in the whole person. I was hoping they would just see my enthusiasm, honesty, standards and values."

Alyssa gives credit to her parents, William and Margaret, for instilling in her these intangibles. Actually, during the pageant's interviewing process, the most poignant part for Alyssa was when questioning centered around family life.

"At that point I missed my family so much, it was difficult for me to answer. My voice cracked a little bit," she said.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
Our Lady of Mercy High School senior Alyssa Stephany was crowned state Junior Miss in Whitehall, N.Y., last month.

Although Alyssa's family was not allowed to have direct contact with her during pageant week, they still provided her with some much-needed doses of moral support.

"My brother (Bryan) enclosed a Scripture verse each day," she said.

These verses were especially needed toward the weekend, as Alyssa endured shin splints and a pulled ligament which hampered her grueling fitness routines

and ballet-dance numbers.

"If there was anything I could do over, I'd get a pair of aerobic shoes. I just had incredible pain," she recalled. In fact, on the final day of performing, "the judges were coming off as we (contestants) were, and I just got past them before I started crying."

Yet she relied on verses such as Philippians 4:13 — "I have the strength for everything for him who empowers me" — and Joshua 1:9 — "I command you, be firm and steadfast! Do not fear or be dismayed, for the Lord, your God, is with you wherever you go" — to survive these challenging final moments.

"I had been praying all week, but that's when I really began asking the Lord if He could help me make it through," she acknowledged.

Alyssa, a parishioner at St. Jerome's Church in East Rochester, earned more than \$4,000 in college scholarship money for securing the state crown. Beginning this fall, she plans to major in medicine at a college not yet determined.

Prior to that time, however, some unfinished business awaits her: the national Junior Miss finals in Mobile, Ala., where she will compete in late June.

In the meantime, Alyssa said that she's currently enjoying her state championship too much to worry about nationals just yet.

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