

Elon student wins Miss Tennessee in National American Miss Pageant

katy.steele

While traditionally students spend Labor Day weekend cooking out and hanging out, Elon University sophomore Kacey Stark was crowned Miss Tennessee for the National American Miss Pageant. The weekend long event was held in Franklin, Tenn., right outside her hometown.

Although modest about her success, Stark has won 19 awards and titles since entering her first pageant, which she won, at the age of 12. Introverted as a little girl, she said pageants helped to bring her out of her shell. After years of competing, she's gained valuable public speaking skills, confidence and close friendships that kept her coming back year after year she said. After high school, Stark wasn't expecting to do any more pageants, but when her mom suggested the 2010 American Miss competition, she thought, "Why not?"

"I keep saying I'm done, I'm not going to do any more pageants...and then I do," Stark said.

When she really became interested in pageantry, she was looking for more than just an excuse to dress up. Instead, she wanted to find an outlet for her true passion — music. A Nashville, Tenn. native, Stark is a die-hard fan of both Titan's football and country music. She started singing and playing the guitar her freshman year of high school. Although the talent portion is usually optional, she said that she enjoys performing at competitions. Her rendition of Julianne Hough's "My Hallelujah" helped her become the Miss Tennessee Talent winner of 2008.

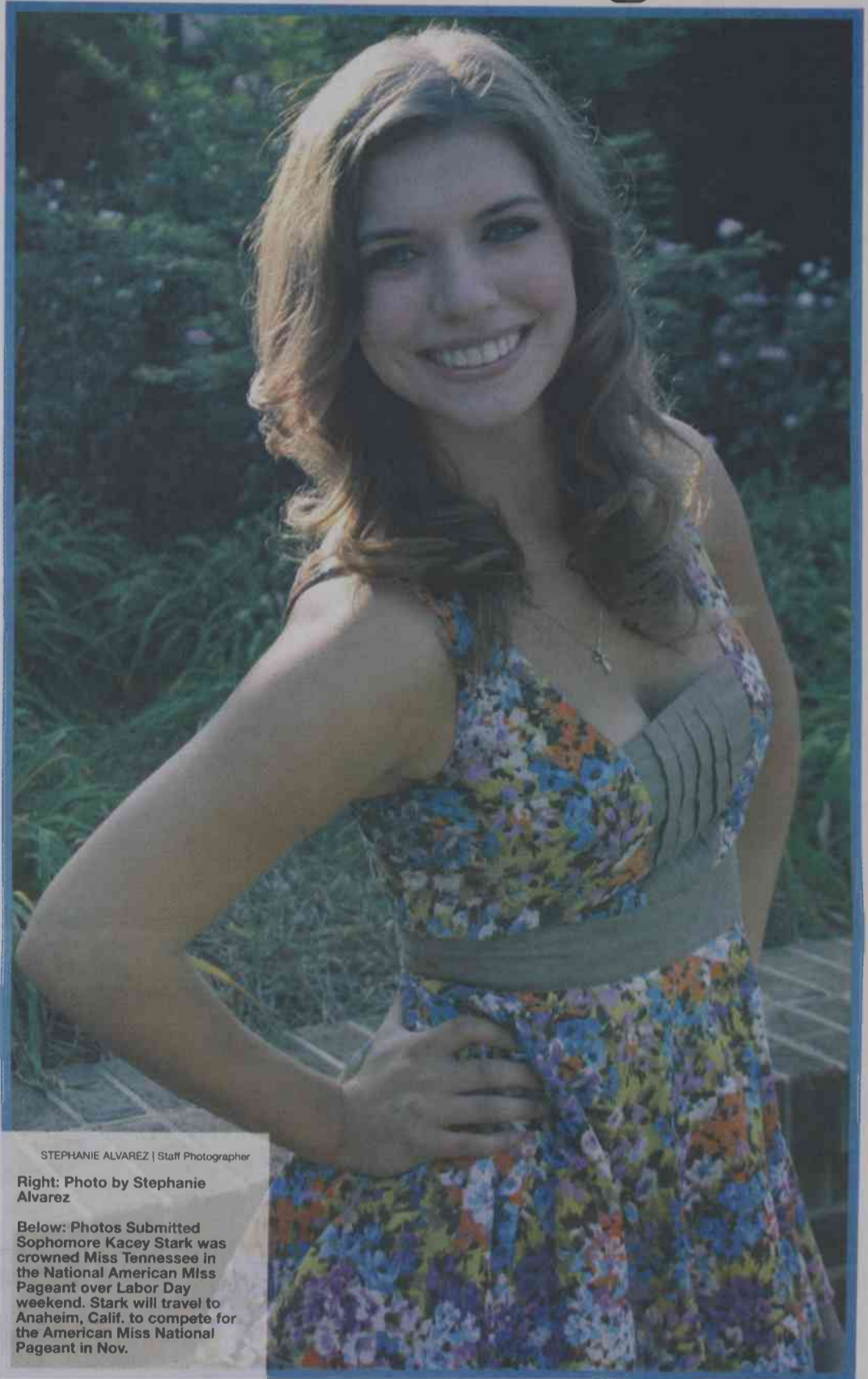
Yet Stark said it isn't all about winning. Noting that her pageant experience has been "nothing like what you see on *Toddlers in Tiaras*," she's thankful for the support of her mom, dad and little brother who always remind her to simply do her best and be herself.

Shows like TLC's "Toddlers in Tiaras" have led to major misconceptions about the pageant world, she said. Many people associate pageants with glamour and vanity, but Stark said she feels that isn't the case.

"It's not about dressing up like Barbie for the day, or seeing who has the prettiest face," she said.

Stark describes the pageant girls she's met as brilliant leaders dedicated to serving their schools and communities. At Elon, Stark is producing a new ESTV show called "Playlist" that will cover the local music scene and this past summer she interned for iTrip Luxury Vacation Rentals, a company that now sponsors her. Overall, Stark said she hopes to change the stereotype of conceited and ditsy pageant girls.

This Thanksgiving when many students are driving home, Stark will be flying to Anaheim, Calif. for the American Miss National Pageant. Competing against at least 40 other contestants, this will be her second trip out to the California competition. She moved on to nationals in 2003, but ended up with laryngitis. Pending Stark stays healthy this year; the final night of the pageant, Nov. 28, is also her birthday. While a crown would be the ultimate present for any girl's 20th birthday celebration, Stark said she treasures the friends she's made and the ways she's grown more than a crown and sash.



STEPHANIE ALVAREZ | Staff Photographer
Right: Photo by Stephanie Alvarez
Below: Photos Submitted
Sophomore Kacey Stark was crowned Miss Tennessee in the National American Miss Pageant over Labor Day weekend. Stark will travel to Anaheim, Calif. to compete for the American Miss National Pageant in Nov.

