

Students get a taste of life as a soap star

BY MICHAEL PUCCI
ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

"American Idol" isn't the only talent competition America voted for last week.

Two UNC students were announced as runners-up Monday in a nationwide search of college students for multi-episode roles on the CBS soap opera "The Young and the Restless."

Last week, sophomore Alexandra Villarreal and Brandon Smith, a graduate student in the Department of Dramatic Art, performed screen tests along with eight other contenders on "The Early Show," after which viewers voted on their favorite male and female.

The search began on March 30, when the soap opera held an open casting call at UNC-CH, as well as at four other universities across the country.

"It was basically a cattle call," Smith, 24, said. "A lot of kids were going in, but there were so many of us that the original audition was actually a brief interview, which usually isn't typical."

Villarreal heard about the auditions the day they were held, skipping her 11 a.m. class and rushing home to print off a photograph.

"My mom basically raised me on the show," she said. "When I was a baby, I would hear it. I've always watched soaps. All my guy friends tease me because I watch it."

The 10 finalists were announced May 14 on "The Early Show." Soon after, CBS e-mailed them the

scripts, flew them up to New York (Villarreal from her home in Dayton, Ohio) and put them up at The Pierre, a Four Seasons hotel.

"It was absolutely insane," Smith recalled of how quickly everything came together. "I had no time to rehearse with someone until the morning of (my screen test)."

Last Monday, Villarreal portrayed a sassy girl accusing a friend (played by Emmy-nominated actress Lauren Woodward) of sleeping with her boyfriend.

"It was much different than my normal personality," she said. "I usually don't yell at people — I don't have friends who sleep with my boyfriend. It was cool to play the bitch."

Smith's screen test came Tuesday, when he acted with Greg Rikaart in a heated scene in which they argue over an electrocuted girlfriend.

"It was exhilarating and fun, and it was really nice to get to meet some of the people working professionally in the business," Smith said.

For Villarreal, whose only prior acting experiences were from small theater classes and in front of her mirror, the narrow loss didn't diminish the luster of her unexpected opportunity.

"This has been amazing exposure for me," she said. "I want to go into TV news, so this has been perfect."

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

Edwards could sway race as VP

Senator could boost Kerry's N.C. bid

BY MARK PUENTE
STAFF WRITER

John Kerry's chances to carry North Carolina in November's presidential election might increase if Sen. John Edwards, D-N.C., is his vice presidential candidate, according to a recent poll.

In a Mason-Dixon poll, sponsored by WRAL-TV, 46 percent of North Carolinians asked said they would vote for President Bush even if Edwards were on Kerry's ticket. Kerry, a Democratic senator from Massachusetts, still won 45 percent of the vote — making the race dead even.

But without Edwards on a theoretical Democratic ticket, Bush garnered 45 percent to Kerry's 41 percent.

Independent Ralph Nader received 3 percent, and 8 percent of voters were undecided.

But experts say a Kerry-Edwards ticket still might not unseat Bush in the state.

"It may help, but it might not be enough," said Jack Fleer, professor emeritus of political science at Wake Forest University.

North Carolina, a traditional Republican stronghold, is not considered a key battleground state for

either candidate. Its electoral votes have not gone to a Democratic presidential candidate since Jimmy Carter took the state in 1976.

The candidates' behavior echoes these sentiments, as neither campaign has run any television ads here.

However, Edwards ran a formidable presidential campaign that sparked a great deal of interest, particularly in his home state.

And since poll results show that Bush's support has weakened, it might push Kerry to closely consider his campaign strategy less than six months before the election.

Ferrel Guillory, director of UNC's Program on Southern Politics, Media and Public Life, said the poll numbers combined with Edwards' energizing of the Democratic Party could provide the group with some motivation.

"It suggests — doesn't guarantee, it only suggests — the Democrats have a chance to win North Carolina."

At the same time, he added, "You have got to say that Bush is the front-runner in this state. He won last time."



DTH FILE PHOTO
Former Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards (center) could help John Kerry win North Carolinians' votes in the presidential race.

Fleer said he is leery of the poll because it was taken at the height of the Iraqi prison abuse scandal. He said that people are willing to respond to pollsters' questions but that how they respond in November is different.

"The Republicans have the advantage. It's Bush's to lose," Fleer

said. Still, he added, "It is going to be an extraordinarily close election. Events in October and November will determine what happens on Election Day."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

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