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Drag contestants unhappy

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Question & Talent Competition.

"It doesn't happen — nobody wins every category, unless they're perfect," said Shane Kindley who performs as Jessica Raynes Starr and who won second runner up and alternate in the pageant. "There had to be some other motive to her winning."

Kindley is not alone. The third alternate runner up Bryan Tipton, who performs as Sierra Santana, has performed for 18 years and has competed in nearly 10 pageants, winning four pageants including Miss Charlotte Pride 2004 before the organization changed its name, ownership and leadership to Pride Charlotte in 2006. She reiterated, "I believe in this community and in the importance of drag... but it is not common for one contestant to win every category especially with so many contestants. Something went foul in the judging."

Several contestants noted that since the beginning of Pride Charlotte and the pageant in 2006, the Miss Pride Charlotte winners have been routine drag performers from The Scorpio. The first runner up this year, Charlotte Damone, also performs regularly in the cast at the club.

According to Denise Palm-Beck, the current board chair of the Lesbian & Gay Community Center and a member of the Pride Charlotte planning committee, Scorpio was one of the largest Pride Charlotte event sponsors this year, along with Chasers Adult Entertainment Club, its other business property.

Palm-Beck was unaware of the past winners having a connection to Scorpio and denied any connection between the winners and the sponsorship.

"I think that is a dangerous assumption to make," Palm-Beck cautioned. "Nothing was done under the table and it sounds like sour grapes from a few contestants... we tried very hard to make the pageant fun, fair and equally entertaining."

Palm-Beck said she didn't know how often a contestant wins all pageant categories. "The probability is like going to Vegas and winning a slot machine," she said.

Donald O'Shields, the owner of The Scorpio and Chasers, commented, "We are proud to be the main sponsor of Pride this year. It is an important event for our community. I believe Pride Charlotte did the best they could with the pageant and has learned a lot."

But, like other contestants and audience members, O'Shields acknowledged the difficulty in one contestant to carry all the pageant's contests.

O'Shields said Scorpio was not involved with the operation of the pageant and Pride Charlotte's use of the bar facility was considered an in-kind donation to the group.

Prior to the festival at Gateway Village on July 25, both Kindley and Tipton had disassociated their name with the Pride Charlotte Pageantry System. Tipton refused to perform at Pride Charlotte and declined his prize winnings. Kindley said he ultimately chose to perform in the spirit of Pride, but still has concerns over the contest and its results.

Pageantry audience member Brian Coones said he shares a similar concern from the July 10 pageant night.

"I agree Felicia Monet is talented and maybe even deserved to win, but I truly can't wrap my mind around one person winning every category," Coones said. "I was there, I have been in the drag world for some time and I can't believe Felicia won every category. I mean it seems shady — many in the audience left immediately after the winner was announced."

The Pride Charlotte Pageantry System confirmed that there were five judges and two auditors. None of the judges were to have any connection to any specific bar or performer. One judge was chosen from the Pride Charlotte planning committee and judges in the final pageant could not have judged in any preliminary. As customary, the Pride Charlotte Pageantry System gave each contestant copies of their judging sheets following the pageant.

Kindley and Tipton expressed their concerns about the judging the night of the pageant to pageant committee members. Both, along with other performers, went as far as to compare individual score sheets and concluded that the results were "highly suspect." According to Kindley, one contestant requested a meeting with the pageant committee to discuss the concerns. Woods did not confirm or deny any complaints being expressed.

"Any contestant who would like to question their judging results should look at the comments made by the judges on their score sheets and review the video of the pageant," Woods said.

Palm-Beck said the committee had reviewed the pageant and concluded everything was fair. "After a careful review, there is nothing to indicate by the score sheets that the outcome would have been any different. I don't know what else you can do."

O'Shields questioned the knowledge and experience of those organizing and judging the event.

"I think it is safe to say that Pride Charlotte knew nothing about pageants or picking judges," he said. "Frankly there are people on the panel who should not have been judges. I don't know their qualifications and it is important to have quality judges."

According to Kindley and Tipton, many of the contestants will not participate again next year and question whether their sponsor bar would do so either. Kindley cites not only the judging bias but also the amount of time, money and energy spent on the pageant.

"I feel like we should stand up for what we

see Pageant on 13

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