

Ms. WestFest Pageant

Artwork/CHERYL BEAUTY BUNN

By LORA VANDERHALL
Lifestyles Editor

WestFest, Inc. sponsored its first annual Ms. WestFest Pageant, in addition to the one day festival.

Since the start of the festival in 1986, there has been an interest in expanding to two days instead of one, said Sam Young, president of WestFest, Inc.

"We wanted to give black women an outlet that they may not have had growing up," said Olle Hough, pageant director.

Hough is a fashion designer and in the past has worked with a variety of pageants including the Miss Black South Carolina Pageant and Miss Black USA Pageant. She is also the owner of O. H. Fashions in Lancaster, S.C.

Preparations for the pageant began as early as February with the initial recruitment.

"We placed applications in several locations and we had approximately 25 applications. Eighteen were chosen but we ended up with 15 contestants," said Hough.

The pageant was open to women between the ages of 21 and 40, regardless of marital status.

Soon after the official announcement of the pageant at a press conference, rehearsals began.

"We had rehearsals at the Afro-American Cultural, Spaug Middle School and the final rehearsals were at the Civic Center," she said.

During the course of rehearsals the contestants went through a series of workshops including: speech instruction, modeling tips, dance lessons and clothing tips.

"We also had a pizza party, a catered pool party and we were

the invited guest of the Civic League's annual 'Evening Under the Stars'.

On the day of the pageant the contestants stayed at the Radisson Plaza Hotel, courtesy of Soft Sheen Products of Chicago, one of the co-sponsors.

Other sponsors included WJZY Channel 46, Fashion Fair Cosmetics and radio station WPEG.

Prior to the start of the pageant the contestants were interviewed by the judges.

"They were judged on communications and salesmanship," said Hough. Those two categories accounted for a maximum of 20 points each.

"The total number of points that could be received was 155," said Young.

Other categories included: talent-40 points, evening gown-25 points, personality-30 points and swimwear-20 points.

"The individual with the highest number of points was selected Ms. WestFest," Young said.

The pageant commentators were Samantha Thompson, of WPEG and John Gordon, of WJZY.

After the prelude the contestants introduced themselves while doing a song and dance number to 'Bubbling Brown Sugar.'

"They wore top hats and tails with a variety of colored cummerbunds."

"Ms. Barbara Howse-Meadows choreographed the dance," Hough added.

Seven semi-finalist were chosen based on the number of points each had acquired.

The semi-finalist were: Chella Mills, Amy Villegas, Lisa Bigelow-Basnight, Kathy Mingo, Deborah Osborne, Tommicha

Walker and Angela Williams. "Each (semi-finalist) had to answer a question on stage," Hough said.

"The judges were trying to select a spokesperson to represent WestFest," she said.

Young added, "It was not a beauty contest or a talent contest. It was based on choosing a well rounded person who would be a good spokesperson."

"She (Ms. WestFest) needs to be aware of who we are as blacks, willing to serve and be representative of black women in this community with poise, beauty, charm and grace. She has to have a social conscience and be willing to work in the projects as well as the board room."

The judges were: Donna Blunt, Philadelphia, Pa; Larry Mallory, Chicago, Ill; Dr. Douglas Rucker, Lancaster, S.C.; Diane Ervin, Charlotte; and Kirk Myers, Charleston, S.C.

"We felt very secure in the fairness of the pageant," said Young.

The talent that was presented ranged from singing to monologues.

"After the competition we got a request from the audience asking Chiffon Dinkins to do another song," said Hough.

Dinkins, 21, received a standing ovation for her acapella version of 'His Eye Is On The Sparrow.'

Previously she sang 'And I'm Telling You,' by Jennifer Holiday.

Second place went to Deborah Osborne, 37, of Charlotte. She received \$500 in cash and a year supply of Soft Sheen Products.

Kathy Mingo, 24, also of Char-

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lotte, was chosen as Ms. Congeniality and she was the first runner-up. Mingo received \$1,000 cash and a year supply of Soft Sheen Products.

The winner was Angela Williams, 22, of Boone, N.C. She received \$1,500 in cash, a year supply of Soft Sheen Products and a trip to Montego Bay, Jamaica.

The remaining semi-finalist received flowers and plaques. All of the contestants received gifts from Fashion Fair Cosmetics and Soft Sheen Products.

"Overall the pageant was good and the ladies did an excellent job," said Hough. "Next year we're expecting a larger number of contestants."

"It's not a typical pageant because we take an active interest in the ladies. We're trying to help some of the women in their various careers."

"For instance, there is a young lady who is interested in attending law school and I understand that some contacts have been made for her, one of the girls is an artist and a show is being set up for her...another one of the girls is a dancer and she will help coordinate the pageant next year," said Hough.

"The general attitude was that they had a great time and that it was a great learning experience," she concluded.



Ms. WestFest 1989-Angela Williams

Photos/LaNey & Ferguson



Chiffon Dinkins, 21, sang 'And I'm Telling You' and 'His Eye Is On The Sparrow.'



Denise Harrison, 26, is shown above modeling swimwear.



Lisa Bigelow-Basnight introduces herself during a group performance to the tune of 'Bubbling Brown Sugar.'



Sam Young, president of WestFest Inc., is shown above crowning Ms. WestFest 1989, Angela Williams. Kathy Mingo, (l), was first runner-up and Deborah Osborne (r) was second runner-up.



Sweet Obsession was the featured group at the coronation ball.



Angela Williams, 22, portrays a bag lady in a monologue about street life.



I. Lynette Murray, 28, performed a modern dance.



Bessie Boulter, 34, modeled an elegant evening gown.