

Distinguished Young Women program celebrates 55 years

Former participants discuss favorite parts, give advice about Avon scholarship program

By Melissa Jones

The Distinguished Young Women (DYW) program, formerly known as Junior Miss, is starting up again for the 55th year. Avon is the host of the local preliminary round (with participants from all of Hendricks County), and the competition then continues to the state level and the national level.

Senior Kayla Springer, who was the Distinguished Young Woman of Avon 2013, heard about the program from one of her friends.

"One of my friends, [senior] Cindy Stanton, told me I should do it, so I just thought it would be something fun to do," Springer said. "I had no idea how it would turn out, but I just did it because [Cindy] told me to."

The program is made up of practice days as well as several activities outside of the competition itself.

"Really, the more rewarding part of the experience happens outside of the Saturday night program," Stanton, first runner-up of the 2013 competition, said. "All summer long, the DYW girls help with various service projects - the Optimist Fish Fry, a car wash and Camp Be Your Best Self, to name a few. The week of the competition, we have lots of long dance rehearsals but also a ton of bonding time with the other girls via luncheons, pool parties and 'help sessions' in our fabulous choreographer's basement."

Many people have referred to the DYW program as a beauty pageant. Springer said it is not a pageant but rather it is "focused on things outside of what happens on stage."

"An interview is a big portion of [the DYW program]. I think it's actually the most heavily-weighted," Springer said. "Scholastics are [weighted second-highest]. So, the things that are weighted the most are things that are

done outside of [what happens on stage]. What actually happens on stage is still important, but [the DYW program] is not a beauty pageant by any means."

The program offers scholarship money for winners at each level. Aside from scholarship prizes, the program also rewards girls with self-improvement.

"I know I not only speak for myself, but for the other girls as well, when I say that [the] DYW [program not only] gives girls confidence, determination, passion and strength as individuals, but it also teaches girls to lean on one another," Stanton said. "There was no competitive animosity in the group whatsoever but rather a mutual desire to build each other up and see one another succeed. It is a rare competition where you will find this quality."

According to Springer, spending time with the fellow contestants was the best part of the week.

"My favorite part was getting to know all of the girls because there were a lot of Avon girls I did not know that well," Springer said. "So, [the best part] was just all the bonding we got to do throughout the week."

Marlys Pedigo, a co-chairman of the program, believes that every participant grows to be a winner by the end of the competition.

"Without a doubt, my favorite part is getting to know each young woman, watching them grow and change during the summer as they become part of this sisterhood and family, gaining confidence and maturity," Pedigo said. "Each and every one who makes the commitment to participate is a winner in life, whether or not she receives a monetary award. The hardest part of the program is the presentation of awards. At that point, I do not want to have just one winner because it means our time is coming to an end."

The DYW program does not require any entry fee. Pedigo encourages any girl interested to participate, even if she is worried about certain aspects of the competition, including the talent portion and money for the program.

"Many girls are most concerned that they do not have a talent - that is so far from true," Pedigo said. "We do not want this to hold anyone back; everyone has a talent, and we can help with that. Others are concerned about not having appropriate clothing or the money to spend. There is no entry fee, and we encourage borrowing from friends when it comes to formal and interview attire. During the week of the program, the committee works with every girl so they feel comfortable and prepared."

Stanton encourages any girl interested in participating to "go for it."

"There is nothing to lose and so much to gain," Stanton said. "My high school experience would not be complete without DYW, and I cannot speak highly enough about [the program]."

According to Stanton, the experience offers many unique and rewarding experiences to those who are a part of the program.

"About 10 minutes before the program started, the entire group of girls stood backstage in the dressing room in a circle, just glowing with happiness and thanksgiving," Stanton said. "The outcome was no matter to us - then and there we realized just how awesome of a journey we had taken together. That singular moment representing the collection of all our experiences and memories created together is a glowing testimony to the opportunities [offered to] girls who step out of their comfort zones and venture into something as incredible as the Distinguished Young Women program."

Student and Staff Profiles



Erik Roa, 12

What is the weirdest dream you have ever had?

I was walking down the street. There was a house full of clowns, and they sprayed me with Alka Seltzer.

Are you a superstitious person?

Yes, I am Hispanic, so that is a given.

What is your biggest pet peeve?

People that are inconsiderate or closed-minded.

What is your guilty pleasure?

Eating mashed potatoes.

What do you usually do when you are sick?

Lie around like a couch potato.

Corey Ebert, government teacher

What was the worst birthday you have ever had?

When I was nine, I had to have leg surgery on my birthday.

Would you rather be attacked by a bear or a swarm of bees?

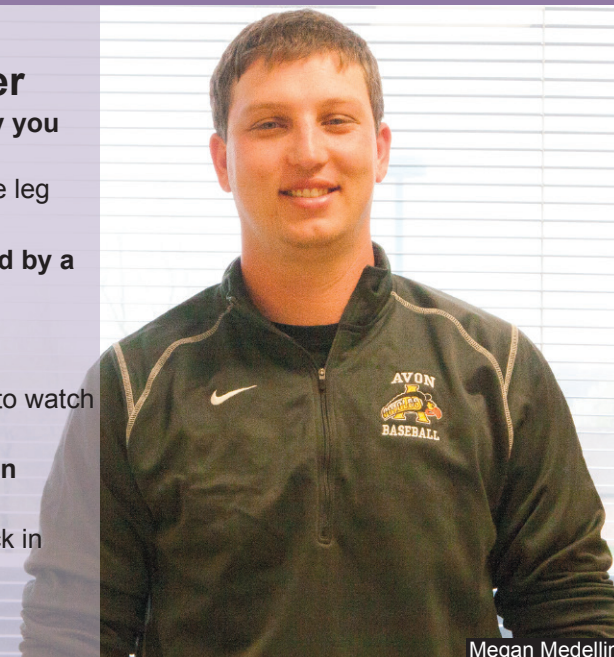
A bear. I could kill a bear.

What movie do you hate?

Most of the chick flicks I have to watch with my wife.

Were you a "cool" kid back in high school?

I got along with everybody back in high school. Ask Mr. Ball.



Megan Medellin