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Sterling women shine in Miss Michigan USA pageant

By Cortney Casey
C & G Staff Writer

STERLING HEIGHTS — A crown isn't the only common bond between Lindsey Tycholiz and Kristen Danyal, recently named Miss Michigan USA 2009 and Miss Michigan Teen USA 2009, respectively.

Both women hail from Sterling Heights — and actually grew up across the street from each other on the city's northwest side.

"It's very crazy that it all worked out like that," said Tycholiz.

Tycholiz, 26, and Danyal, 18, said they didn't know each other well due to their age difference and weren't even aware that the other was competing until they spotted each other's families at Port Huron's McMorran Place Theater during the Sept. 18-20 event.

Melissa Pitchford, executive director for Proctor Productions, the Cincinnati-based company that produces Miss Michigan USA, said she's never seen dual winners from the same city during her involvement with the pageant.

"I've been doing this for 10 years, and it's never happened," she said.

According to Pitchford, any Michigan female — age 14-18 for the teen competition and 18-27 for the main competition — could apply. By the time of the pageant, each category comprised a field of about 60 contestants, which judges whittled down to 15, then five, over the three-day event before selecting the winners, said Pitchford.

Candidates participated in interviews and modeled swimsuits and evening gowns, and judges asked each finalist an on-stage question.

Tycholiz now advances to the Miss USA competition on April 19, 2009, at the Planet Hollywood Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, where 51 women, representing each state and the District of Columbia, will compete, said Pitchford.

Miss USA goes on to vie with 80 to 100 women from around the world for the Miss Universe title, she said, noting that the competition will air on TV in 54 countries and is expected to attract around 600 million viewers.

Danyal will participate in the Miss Teen USA pageant, the date for which has yet to be determined, she said.

Besides coverage of all expenses related to the national pageants, both women receive a four-year scholarship to Baker College, valued at about \$35,000, along with around \$5,000 in other prizes, said Pitchford.



Photo courtesy of Kristen Danyal
Lindsey Tycholiz and Kristen Danyal pose onstage at the McMorran Place Theater in Port Huron, where they were recently crowned Miss Michigan USA and Miss Michigan Teen USA, respectively.
The women grew up across the street from each other in Sterling Heights.

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Tycholiz, a veteran of the pageant circuit since age 16, competed previously in the Miss Michigan USA event. Her past titles include Miss Oakland County 2006 and Miss Southeast Michigan 2004.

She said she was reluctant to go to bed after the pageant, fearful it had all been a thrilling dream.

“Oh my goodness, it was surreal,” she said, recalling the moment she was crowned.

The judges posed questions on politics and current events for some finalists, but she received a more ambiguous one, asking her to explain the difference between “a good decision” and “the best decision.”

After seeing other contestants ramble on in the past, Tycholiz said she opted to keep it “short and sweet,” telling the judges that an individual who makes the best decision will know in his or her heart that it was the right one.

Tycholiz has a bachelor’s degree from Oakland University, where she majored in music education and minored in theater and biology. She said she’s taking a few years to pursue performing and musical theater before launching her teaching career.

She just accepted a new job as a presenter for Saturn, traveling throughout the country to appear at auto shows, and also works as a Marilyn Monroe impersonator.

“It’s not your typical 9 to 5,” she laughed.

Tycholiz said she looks forward to promoting the Miss USA national platform, which focuses on breast cancer and ovarian cancer awareness, as well as touting her personal favorite charities, the Michigan Humane Society and American Lung Association, and promoting music and the arts in schools.

Danyal — like Tycholiz, a Stevenson graduate — had never even dabbled in modeling before, but applied at her mother’s encouragement.

“It was kind of on a whim,” she said.

After making it to the final five, Danyal said she answered a question about the impact of the controversial primetime soap “Gossip Girl” on today’s teens.

Danyal said she believed the show was influential, but lacked positive role models. She cited “Ugly Betty” as a more constructive program, focusing on a well-intentioned main character not solely obsessed with appearances.

“I said there should be more shows like that directed toward teens, with good role models,” she said.

Danyal said she was “in complete shock” when she won, especially considering many contestants had competed previously.

Pitchford said Danyal will be active with the Miss Teen USA national platform, which supports a foundation called Girl Talk, a mentoring program for high school and middle school girls.

Now a freshman in the University of Detroit-Mercy’s physician assistant program, Danyal said she’s basking in her current excitement before dwelling on the next level of competition ahead.

“I’m trying not to think about it so much,” she said. “I don’t want to get ahead of myself. I just want to take it in and soak it in ...”

Miss Michigan USA and Miss Michigan Teen USA are both owned by the Miss Universe organization, which is partnered with Donald Trump and NBC Universal.

For more information on the Miss Michigan USA competition, visit www.missmichiganusa.com.

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