

Queen Kelsey Hewitt shares cherry story with youth

By SARAH CHUBY

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The third time was the charm for 2001 National Cherry Queen Kelsey Hewitt.

Hewitt, who now teaches at Interlochen Arts Academy, said one of her driving forces was sister-in-law Mitzi Hewitt, who won the Cherry Queen title in 1991.

Kelsey Hewitt applied for the coveted Cherry Queen spot three times.

"My first experience was when I entered in 1997 and I didn't make the top five. And then I was the first runner up in the 2000 contest. I knew I had what it took," said 23-year-old Hewitt. "My sister-in-law was the last Cherry Queen from Benzie County. I wanted to follow in her footsteps.

"When they announced I won, she was the first to come up to me. She gave me a big hug and she put the necklace around my neck."

As queen, Hewitt spoke on the House floor at the State Capitol, visited more than 50 classrooms and baked cherry pies for other festival queens and parade marshals.

But the Frankfort resident said her fondest memories lie with the elementary school children.

"I received thank-yous from the kids and they are the sweetest things you'd ever want to meet," she said. "They think that you are this real queen walking into their school."

Hewitt said the children also asked interesting questions.

"One asked me if I lived in a castle and everyone wanted to know where my Cherry King was," she said, laughing.

From hearsay, Hewitt knows that her visits made an impact on the children.

"I was told that in their year-books they had to put down the most memorable moment of the year and one wrote, 'Getting to meet the Cherry Queen,'" she said. "And all I had to do is to walk into their classroom and to be who I am."

Hewitt said that as queen there were many things that she wanted to accomplish, but cherry promotion was her top priority.

"My first goal was promoting cherries in any way possible that I could think of. So wherever I went, I'd gather some gift packages together. I went to several local businesses and asked them to donate products," she said. "I was amazed by their generosity.

Hewitt also built a cherry store in her house and attended other festivals to present cherry goodies to each queen, parade director and marshal.

"That had never been done before," she said.

She said her Spanish and English as a Second Language classes at IAA have been a very important part of her year.



Kelsey Hewitt receives the crown and title of National Cherry Queen on July 13, 2001.

"On the first day I brought in dried cherries and cherry stickers," she said. "My International kids call me Miss Cherry."

Hewitt said she was grateful that Interlochen worked with her schedule.

"I teach Thursday through Saturday, so I wanted to design a program to go to elementary schools on Mondays. And I had to take some Saturdays off to go to other festivals and parades."

She said the Cherry Marketing Institute donated supplies that she used in her classroom visits.

"I went to nine or 10 schools in northern Michigan and I visited four to six classes per school," she said. "When I went I would take in a cherry suitcase. CMI supplied me with activity books with cherry history, pencils, cherry stickers and a cherry poster."

Hewitt called all the women vying for the Cherry Queen crown "amazing people."

"I encourage all the candidates to continue being excellent people," she said. "Excellence shouldn't be confused with power. It is about service and being a genuine person. And whether you become next Cherry Queen or not, you can continue doing that. All you need to remember is be yourself."

She said everyone involved with the Cherry Queen's program can learn something, even if they don't receive the crown.

"It is really hard if you don't get it, after you were being your-

self. I remember thinking 'I was just myself and they didn't pick me, what's wrong?,' she said. "My advice is to go on and take with you the best thing that you learned and grow from it. So that you'll come away with something very positive in the end."

Hewitt said she will be there to lend a hand or ear for the 2002 Cherry Queen.

"I hope to remain in contact with the next queen. I still talk to last year's queen, Jennifer Brakel. We look out for each other. It is a sisterhood," she said. "It is a neat legacy that other festivals don't have. Cherry Queens have always been looked up to as leaders, someone who is sincere, genuine and humble. Cherry Queens reach people in positive way, but it is what you make of it."

Even though her royal tenure is up, Hewitt said that she plans on sticking around.

"I'll be involved with the cherry industry for awhile yet," Hewitt said. "I want to continually involve myself in the Cherry Festival. I plan to be an ambassador next year and I hope to be the Cherry Festival president someday."

This year's Queen's Court receives a wardrobe from Younker's Department Store. The Cherry Queen receives a college scholarship given in part by Huntington Bank. The Queen's Coronation Ball is hosted by the Park Place Hotel.

Meet the 2002 National Cherry Queen Finalists



Heidi Grabemeyer, 23, of Dowagiac. She is the daughter of William and Diana Grabemeyer of Dowagiac. Grabemeyer attended Central Michigan University where she studied Health Fitness in Preventative and Rehabilitative Programs. She is a dance instructor for children. Her hobbies include skiing, dancing, reading and volunteering. Her sponsor is Radom Farm Supplies.



Brandi McClain, 20, of Grayling. She is the daughter of Dave and Gayle McClain of Grayling. McClain is studying Spanish and English at the University of Michigan. Her interests include dramatics, dancing and modeling. She is a member of the University of Michigan Drama Club and Dance Touring Company, among other groups. She is a ballet instructor for children with learning disorders and a volunteer. Her sponsor is Gaylord Truck Accessories.



Kelly Plucinski, 20, of Williamsburg. She is the daughter of Gary and Karen Plucinski of Williamsburg. Plucinski is studying theater performance at Oakland University. She participates in making student films and enjoys outdoor activities — she lists basketball and rollerblading among her favorites. Her sponsor is Pirate's Cove Adventure Park.



Ashley Prusick, 19, of Traverse City. She is the daughter of Vince and Paula Prusick of Traverse City. Prusick studies organizational communication at Michigan State University. She is a model and has participated in promotionals and infomercials for national companies. She is a member of the National Honor Society of Collegiate Scholars and is on the Dean's List at MSU. Her sponsor is Big Jon, Inc.



Kinsley Robinson, 22, of East Lansing. She is the daughter of Bob and Judy Robinson of Traverse City. Robinson studied communications and public relations at Michigan State University. She is a Special Olympics volunteer and a member of the Alpha Phi sorority. She enjoys golf, singing, skiing and kick boxing. Her sponsor is Staff Pro, Inc.