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Miss NH USA gets a makeover

New directors bring Hollywood style to pageant

By Kelly Sennott
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Gone are the identical girls with shiny sashes and matching pink swimsuits like in the movie *Miss Congeniality*.

This year's Miss New Hampshire USA pageant, held Friday, Nov. 25, and Saturday, Nov. 26, will resemble a "high-end fashion show," blending Hollywood and New Hampshire styles, thanks to new co-directors Keith Lewis and Keylee Sanders, known together as K2.

The two are superstars in the Miss USA pageant world. Lewis has directed Miss California USA and Miss Teen California USA pageants since 2003 — an impressive résumé, as Miss California titleholders have been top 15 finalists in Miss USA every year since then. In 2011, K2 was responsible for registering the largest number of state contestants in the history of the Miss USA pageant, with more than 400 women entering Miss California USA.

Lewis also has been an agent for 20 years. Sanders is a Miss USA alumna who has made appearances on The Style Network, E!, Joyous and TV Guide as celebrity stylist and style expert. Lewis said it's the expertise he and Sanders bring that has given their past shows such success.

Deb Daigle of Montagne Communications said that an increase in the popularity of the New Hampshire show would include economic benefits. There are many girls signed up for this year's pageant, and the goal is to increase the number to 150 next year.

All the vendors, stylists, clothes, and fashion are from New Hampshire; they include the BRAVO Boutique of Concord, which has been designing gowns for 23 years now.

"The people in New Hampshire have great pride, and we're trying to capture that here," Lewis said, noting that beauty pageants in the past have been known to marginalize their contestants.

"We're putting forward a more fashion-relevant, modern show. We're removing the banners, for it will be the outfits and the women

that you're looking at. Each contestant will come in individual style," Lewis said. "It's the outfits you'll be looking at, and they'll be dressed by Keylee, who is a stylist for the stars," he said.

The current Miss New Hampshire USA, LacyJane Folger, said that K2's expertise helped her a great deal in preparing her for the Miss USA competition last April. K2 Productions took over the pageant in February, after Miss New Hampshire and Miss Teen New Hampshire were chosen. They prepared the current Miss New Hampshire and Miss Teen New Hampshire, Lacy Jane Folger and Annie Read, for the Miss USA pageant.

"Young people have to remember that you are your brand. With the globalization, everything you do, every image you put out can benefit or detract you. You have to put out the tools and the best appearance you can so that you're able to reap the benefits," Lewis said.

And K2 helps with outward beauty, yes, but also works to provide contestants with the other tools they need, both in the competition and in life.

"Keith has been a huge motivator for me," Folger said. "I really trusted him — he really knows what he's talking about, and he really encouraged me to be the best I could, inside and out. He's a very strong advocate that beauty has to come from within you, and I've really taken that and run with it," Folger said. "The interview portion, in particular, really helped me better myself, even in my career," Folger said, noting that K2 flew her and Miss Teen New Hampshire out to California to run mock interviews with the Miss California winners.

Lewis says that pretty is what you are, but beauty is what you do with it.

"The important thing to know is that anyone can benefit from self-exploration, and anyone can benefit from polishing their outward beauty," Lewis said. "The women who compete go through a huge transition. People always assume that the people in magazine photos came that way, when in reality they were made that way," Lewis said. Being part of this process is one reason he loves being part of pageant competitions such as these.



(left) Keith Lewis. (right) Keylee Sanders. Courtesy photo.

In this year's Miss New Hampshire USA, there will be \$30,000 in cash prizes and scholarships for contestants, some of which is distributed to all competitors, and some of which goes to the top five. Competitors will be judged on character, poise, confidence and personality in evening attire, swim wear, and the interview. This year, there is also a social networking category in the competition, in which the competitors aim to draw in the largest number of votes via Facebook and Twitter accounts.

"This year, Miss New Hampshire USA is going to give the Victoria's Secret fashion show a run for its money. It really will be the talk of the state, because they've got an unbelievable show planned," Folger said.

The event will be held at the Armory Exhibition Center at the Radisson Hotel, 700 Elm St., Manchester. The presentation show will take place Saturday, Nov. 26, at 7 p.m., and the final show and crowning will occur Sunday, Nov. 27, at 4 p.m. Tickets can be purchased at <http://miss-newhampshireusa.com/event.html>.

Miss New Hampshire USA pageant

When: Presentation show Saturday, Nov. 26, at 7 p.m. Final show and crowning Sunday, Nov. 27, at 4 p.m.

Where: The Armory Exhibition Center at the Radisson Hotel, 700 Elm St., Manchester
Admission: Presentation show \$35. Final show and crowning \$45 for general admission. For reserved seating packages, visit <http://missnewhampshireusa.com/event.html>.