

Alana Lee crowned Miss Nevada 2011

6:59 PM, Jul. 4, 2011 |

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Alana Lee, Miss Nevada 2011, carries her bouquet and scepter after winning the title Saturday at the CasaBlanca. This year's Miss Mesquite, Elizabeth Mercado, in the background, was second runner-up. / Bob Challinor, Desert Valley Times

The 21-year-old broadcast journalism major at Dixie State College was ecstatic, of course, but she was able to watch the scene surrounding her with a telling sense of analysis. She was even comfortable when she found herself in the role of interviewee instead of the interviewer.

"This is life-changing," Lee said, "I really think it is. I'm really looking forward to next year. I can't imagine what opportunities I've created for myself."

The friendly blonde, who represented Miss Clark County, began her journey to the Miss Nevada crown competing as Miss Greater Las Vegas in the Miss Clark County Scholarship Pageant Jan. 7-8.

"I've been preparing ever since," she said.

Lee bested 13 other contestants in the Miss Nevada Scholarship Pageant presented Friday and Saturday nights in the packed CasaBlanca Resort Showroom. Her platform was "improving relations through effective communication" and her talent was singing. She also earned the \$1,000 Academic Award scholarship.

"My strong suit is typically the interview," Lee said. "My talent was the best I've ever done and I was so happy that I won the Academic Award."

Lee was crowned the new Miss Nevada by Mesquite's Cris Crotz, the outgoing 2010 Miss Nevada. In her farewell, Crotz said: "I grew up a rock-and-roll loving tomboy with a free spirit and an eye for cutting-edge fashion. The path I had in my own mind never even tripped over the idea of Miss America. But I know now I stumbled upon the Miss America Organization not by mistake.

"It was only two years ago that I began my journey to Miss Nevada. Competing in my first local pageant on a whim, thirst for the stage and need of scholarship turned into the most fulfilling and life-altering two years of my life."

Crotz, who wore the black evening gown she wore in the Miss America pageant, earned \$13,000 in scholarships during the last two years.

"Today, I am a stronger, happier, open, successful, loving and better woman because of the Miss America Organization," Crotz said. "I will be forever grateful for the changes and opportunities this year has given me. I hope I have made the state proud. I know I am proud."

This year's Miss Mesquite, Elizabeth Mercado, captured second runnerup in the 2011 Miss Nevada pageant, behind Lee and first runnerup Kellie Mills. Mercado, a 22-year-old business major at the College of Southern Nevada, won the \$1,000 Community Service Scholarship Award.

Mercado displayed grace and poise on stage. She sailed through a technical malfunction during her vocal talent presentation and was stunning in a gold evening gown. Her platform was "Give It Up!" blood donation.

Sixteen-year-old Bailey Gumm, representing Miss Lake Tahoe Teen, was crowned Miss Nevada's Most Outstanding Teen 2011. Gumm, whose nine-year-old sister, Carli, is part of the Silver State Princess Program, wants to become a certified speech language pathologist. Her platform is "A Voice for Autism." She performed a contemporary tap dance for the talent portion of the Miss Outstanding Teen program. She was judged the best of 14 Miss Nevada Outstanding Teen competitors.

Gumm succeeds Angela Foremaster, 2010 Miss Nevada Outstanding Teen.

"This means the world to me," Gumm said. "I am so honored. I can't wait to start. I'm going to go with my platform and get my voice out there to the community."

She believed she nailed her talent performance to help boost her in the competition.

"I was able to walk off the stage knowing there was nothing more I could walk off with," she said. "It was all I could ask for."

Miss Nevada scoring is based on five areas of competition: private judges interview (25 percent); talent competition (35 percent); evening wear competition (20 percent); swimsuit (15 percent) and on-stage question (five percent.) Miss Nevada's Outstanding Teen scoring is based on private judges interview (30 percent); talent competition (35 percent); evening wear/on-stage question competition (20 percent); lifestyle and fitness competition (10 percent); and scholastic achievement (five percent.)

Mesquite's Outstanding Teen, Hannah Covey, electrified the audience in the talent competition transforming a classic Bach toccata into a contemporary improvisational performance on the violin. Covey, 16, wants to pursue a career in ultrasonography, and her platform was "POP – Power of Performance," on the premise that empowering children to perform gives them valuable life skills.

Kelly Smith, a Mesquite financial advisor, was a member of the seven-person judging panel that awarded Mills (Miss Northern Counties) the Miss Nevada talent competition title and Emily Messina (Miss Henderson Teen) the Outstanding Teen competition crown. Mills won over judges with her outstanding vocal performance and Messina was flawless on the piano.

Finishing as third runnerup behind Lee, Mills and Mercado in the Miss Nevada pageant were Randi Sundquist (Miss Summerlin) and Diana Sweeney (Miss Lake Tahoe.)

Messina was first runnerup in Miss Nevada Outstanding Teen voting followed by second runnerup Sabrina Singh (Miss Southern Counties Teen); third runnerup Emilie Heidenreich (Miss Truckee Meadows Teen) and Leah Walters (Miss Douglas County Outstanding Teen) fourth runnerup.

Marisela Avitia (Miss Carson City) earned the Miracle Maker Award for raising the most money among contestants for the Children's Miracle Network.

Miss Nevada will compete in three nights of Miss America preliminaries Jan. 10-12, 2012 at Planet Hollywood's Theatre for the Performing Arts. The two-hour pageant finals will air live on ABC Saturday, Jan. 14.

Miss America's Outstanding Teen Pageant is scheduled for 7 p.m., Saturday, Aug. 20, at the Orange County Convention Center.

Sue Lowden, who serves on the Miss America board of directors and was a former Miss America contestant who ran against Sharron Angle for the Republican nomination for U.S. Senate last year, thanked Mesquite for "wrapping its arms around this program the last two years."