



N.P. woman places second in pageant

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A Ventura County resident and mother of six placed second last week in the Mrs. United States Pageant in Las Vegas.

Wearing all white on the stage, Wendy Knapp, 34, of Newbury Park focused on her children as well as a platform promoting adoption, she said.

"The Mrs. Pageant allows you to promote marriage and show the family strength in your community," said Knapp, who adopted three of her six children.

The Mrs. United States Pageant was a five-day event which ended Thursday at the Silverton Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. As one of 54 contestants from across the country, Knapp was evaluated on beauty, charm, personality, poise, and her ability to articulate. First place was awarded to Stephanie Hunt of Michigan.

Knapp competed on stage in evening gown and physical fitness in swimsuit competitions, and participated in personal interviews with a panel of judges who included actresses Lauren Holly, who was seen in the film "Dumb and Dumber," and Lydia Cornell of TV's "Curb Your Enthusiasm" and "Too Close For Comfort."

Knapp won Mrs. California in 2005, but because she was pregnant during her term, she was invited to come back this year. Several states do not have Mrs. Pageant competitions, so this year Knapp represented one of them — Wyoming.

"She has a sparkling personality," Hunt said of her fiercest competitor, who spent plenty of time snapping photos of nearly every woman in the competition. "Gosh, she's got a sense of humor."

Formerly Miss Teen Simi Valley and Mrs. Westlake, Knapp has been competing in pageants throughout her life. She graduated from California State University, Northridge with a bachelor's degree in liberal studies, and has a single-subject teaching credential, but she loves being a full-time mother.

"It's a lot of fun," she said. "I've always had a lot of kids around."

She said she enjoyed her time in the pageant and related well to her competition. "Honestly, it's always been nerve racking, but I just kind of let go and have fun with it," she said.

"These women are just amazing," she added. "They all have nonprofit organizations or work with their communities, and then they go home and do laundry and cook for their kids."

The swimsuit competition required that contestants wear bikinis this year, she said.

"I've never seen such rockin' bodies on moms before. They just take care of themselves."

Nine hours of rehearsals for two days in heels left her blistered and bruised, so she enjoyed her day off halfway through the pageant. While some contestants participated in extra rehearsals that day, Knapp and her roommate, Pamela Tenorio — Mrs. South Dakota — walked the Vegas strip passing out plastic crowns to young girls,

signing autographs and taking pictures with tourists.

"For a few days, I get to be seen as a princess by all of these young girls," she said. "But come Monday, it's back to reality — doing laundry and taking care of the kids."

But don't get her wrong — she loves being a mother, she said.

Her children's ages range from 1 to 15. Four of them were in the audience with her husband Paul, an Oxnard Police detective, cheering her on and holding signs that read: "Go Mommy!"

Knapp said she plans to compete in the Mrs. United States Pageant some time in the future, though her goal is to place in the top 10, rather than win the title.

"How do you go back and do better than runner-up?" she said. "To make the top 10 was the cake. To be in the top five was the icing."

