

SPOKANE LILAC FESTIVAL ASSOCIATION A LITTLE HISTORY OF THE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

In the year 1940, a young woman by the name of Shannon Mahoney was selected as the first Lilac Queen in Spokane. With the exception of three post-war years, a queen has been selected and a court of princesses has accompanied her. Early history tells us that the queen was selected from candidates presented by various organizations such as garden clubs. In 1958, Denise Bogle of Marycliff High School began the tradition of royalty selection from area high schools.

Spokane Lilac Festival Association begins the process of selecting the royalty that has become a traditional part of the festival. Each of the schools in Spokane County has the opportunity of having a representative on the Lilac Court. By the end of December, the process is well under way as young women from the senior class at each school have the opportunity to present themselves as candidates for the Spokane Lilac Festival Royalty Scholarship Program, leading to a seat on the Royal Court.

There are several criteria that must be satisfied including a cumulative GPA of 3.0 for six semesters, leadership roles within the school, volunteer activities in the community, and most importantly, a willingness and interest in representing the city throughout the spring and summer at many events, festivals and community parades. Screening processes in the individual schools vary but ultimately candidates are presented to the Lilac Festival Association for judging. Once the team of scholarship candidates from each high school is in place, the activities begin as they become visible throughout the community and begin training for selection to the Spokane Lilac Festival Royal Court. The selection of a queen involves a more elaborate judging process based on a prepared speech, an impromptu question and individual interviews with five distinguished judges from the community as well as Festival Directors from other communities. The judging process year culminates with the coronation of the Royalty Court. While only one queen is selected each year, the entire court will be at most festival events.

The new court is active throughout the community with personal appearances at retirement homes, civic events, elementary schools, hospitals, charitable fundraising activities, military organizations and of course the many activities of festival week. Their activities continue throughout the summer as they proudly represent Spokane throughout the Northwest at small community parades such as Cheney and large events such as Seattle Seafair.

The rewards are many from serving on the Royal Court, with many fond memories created and many new and lasting friendships formed. Members develop a sense of community and loyalty to their city and county. With the help of corporate sponsors, each court member is also awarded a scholarship to assist her post-high school education.

With a growing population base in the Spokane area, there have been changes in the selection process and the structure of the royalty program. Without a Lilac Queen and Court of Princesses, the Spokane Lilac Festival would not be true to its mission of focus on the outstanding youth of the area. The tradition that started 84 years ago will continue and the royalty program will prosper with support from Spokane and surrounding communities.