

Crowned

This teen's hard work & dedication finally paid off

BY STACY BOOTH

From her poise and confidence, people might not guess Mandy Schendel is 17 and a senior at Hazen High School in Renton. This school body president's poise and confidence has come from 10 years of competing in pageants. And after those years of competition, Mandy took home the title of Miss Washington Teen USA 2008. This was the third time Mandy had vied for the crown and her final year before she was too old to compete for the teen title.

Pageants started on a whim for Mandy: "I got a letter in the mail when I was 7 and it just said 'You've been recommended to do a pageant! Come try it.' So I discussed it with my family and they were like 'Sure, why not? Good growing opportunity, get on stage and get some speaking ability' ... I was third runner-up at my first competition." Mandy says she loved the program and loved meeting and competing with other girls, so she continued to participate in pageants. After taking the Miss Newcastle Teen title at 15, Mandy qualified to compete for Miss Washington Teen USA. That year she was first runner-up. More significant for her, however, was also taking home the title of Miss Congeniality, something voted on by her peers. "That was the best

part of (the competition) because it's knowing that the girls think you hold the qualities of the titleholder and you have those attributes." The following year, Mandy placed in the top 15 but didn't move into the top five (from which runners-up and a winner is crowned). Mandy says that year was "a humbling experience."

For the most recent competition, Mandy says her biggest difference for preparation was working with a trainer at the Club to have the trimmed, toned look judges want to see. "Although I was never unbelievably unprepared, I'd never worked as hard as I should have to really be in swimsuit shape." (The swimsuit competition is one-third of a contestant's total score.) Mandy says she was at the Club, working out, six days a week for the three months leading up to the competition. Although she was a cheerleader, Mandy says that was the opposite of what she needed to be doing: instead of toning, cheerleading builds muscle. In addition to time spent at the Club, Mandy would often practice for the interview portion of the competition, either one-on-one with her mom, Kandy, or in a panel setting with different friends.

After months of preparation,

Mandy and 23 other girls gathered at the Highline Performing Arts Center to compete for the title of Miss Washington Teen USA 2008. Mandy says she doesn't remember her winning moment. "My first runner-up, actually, is one of my good friends ... we're holding hands in that typical pageant stance that just happens when you get down to the final two, and I leaned over and I said 'I'll be an amazing first runner-up to you,' and she starts crying and I'm crying and she says 'No, no, no, it's your year.' All I remember is looking down and the next thing I remember is taking pictures with everyone. I don't actually remember any of it. I don't remember my reaction. I remember I was shaking a lot, and that's it." Mandy says going to sleep that night she was afraid it was a dream, and checked to see if her crown and sash were still next to the bed when she woke. "It was really exciting that next day when it really started to sink in."

During her reign, Mandy is spending time volunteering around





The connections and the networking possibilities are just so phenomenal.” The purpose of her organization is to encourage kids of any age to get involved in their communities. Mandy says in elementary and middle school she was frustrated knowing her classmates could do more to get involved, but they didn’t. “We show (kids) the opportunities that there are in their communities locally, statewide and nationally. (We) show them how much fun it is, how easy it is to get involved and how the simplest thing can make the biggest difference.”

While Mandy has worked hard to have what it takes to be

top of required paperwork and her mom works tirelessly to secure sponsors and help Mandy choose swimsuits, dresses and other clothing. “It really has become a team effort—without my dad’s organizational skills and my mom’s ability to let go of her life and really help me get prepared, and my sister just having the energy and excitement of the group—it honestly couldn’t be done without the help of my family.”

Mandy doesn’t know when the Miss Teen USA pageant will happen, or where she’ll be traveling to compete. She just knows it will be sometime in August, and she has to be ready to appear on national television. “I’m really excited. I’ve heard so many good things about the national competition,” Mandy says. “It is something I’ve worked for really hard and I would really like to take home the national title, so that makes me nervous and excited all at once.”

The competition poses a conundrum for Mandy: She’s applying to colleges and excited to start that new part of her life, but also she wants to become Miss Teen USA, which means she would move to New York City and be a full-time representative of the Miss Universe Organization, which is owned by Donald Trump, setting aside college for a year. “It’s really funny to me, planning for college, but really in the back of my mind I’m thinking ‘I really want to win.’”

the state, wherever she is needed, in addition to finishing her senior year, applying to college and working with her own nonprofit The Difference Maker Organization. Mandy says it was the pageant community that inspired her to start volunteering when she was young. “They highlight volunteering so much,” she says. Her organization is really her passion, in addition to being her biggest chunk of volunteer work. Founded when she was 11 years old, Mandy says it recently received 501(c)(3) status. “We’d really like to continue growing that organization through my year of reign. I know with my title that will help a lot.



crowned Miss Washington Teen, she readily explains all the help she’s received from her family. Mandy says her 9-year-old sister, Melanie, is always honest in opinions and is a fun person to have around: “I admire her in everything she does.” Her dad keeps her on

For more information about the Miss Universe Organization, visit www.missuniverse.com or www.misswashingtonusa.com. For more information about The

Difference Maker Organization, visit www.thedifferencemaker.org.

ABOVE: Mandy with her family, Kandy, Melanie and John Schendel.

OPPOSITE: Mandy is congratulated by her first runner-up and friend, Veronica Miracle, when she learns she won the title.