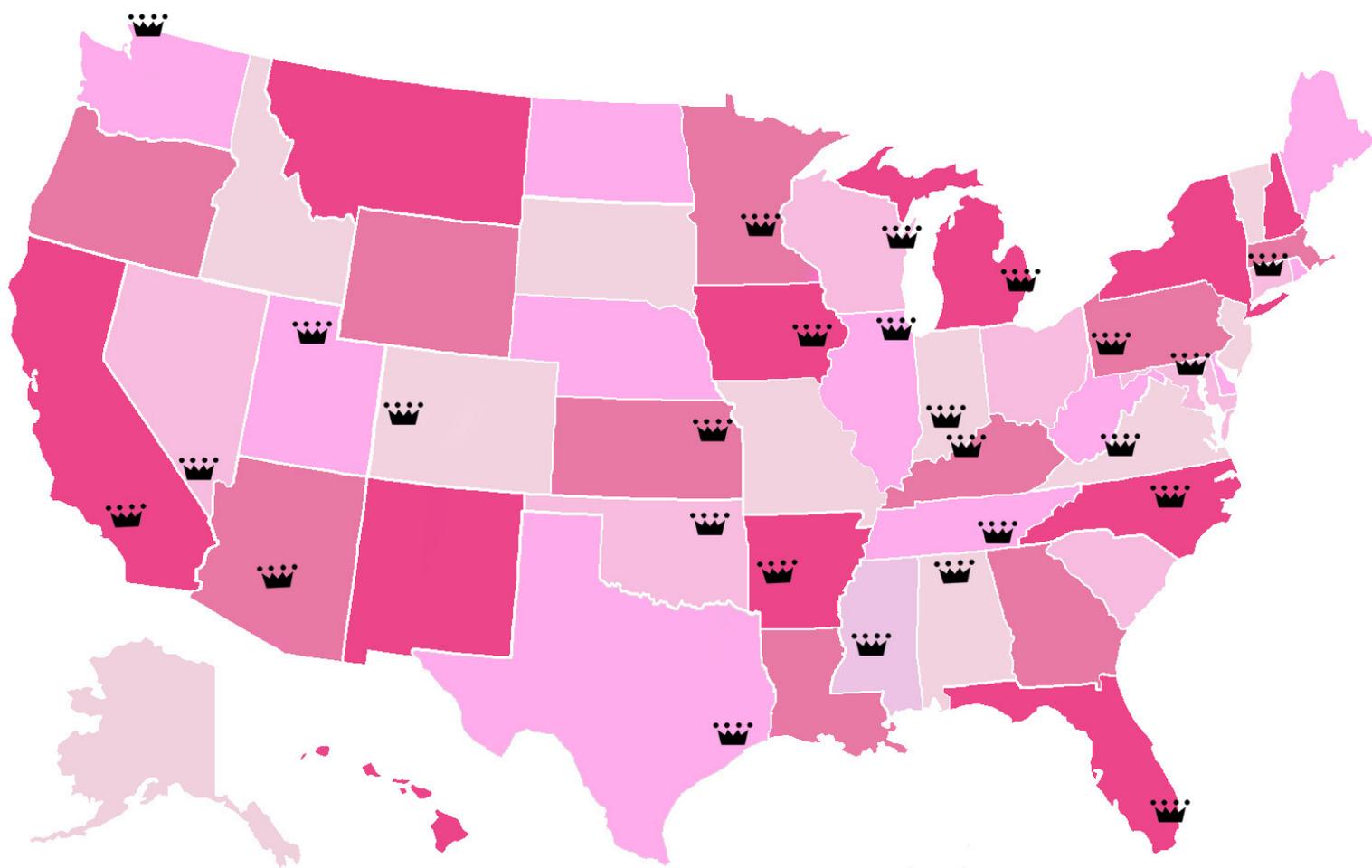


Ms. Wheelchair America

ADVOCACY. EDUCATION. EMPOWERMENT. LEADERSHIP.



**ERIE,
PENNSYLVANIA**
The Ambassador Center



**NATIONAL
PAGEANT**
August 14 - 20, 2017



The City of Erie, Pennsylvania

Joseph E. Sinnott, Mayor

Dear Pageant Participants,

As Mayor of the City of Erie, I am proud to welcome the 46th Annual Ms. Wheelchair America National Pageant. As you know, Erie is one Pennsylvania's largest cities and the Commonwealth's only Great Lake Port. During your stay, I encourage you to experience all that Erie has to offer.

Visit one of our many museums and art galleries. Take in a AA baseball game at UPMC Park, home of the Erie SeaWolves. Hungry? Erie's downtown offers everything including French cuisine, Irish pubs, as well as traditional American favorites. Enjoy our beautiful waterfront, relax on one of Presque Isle's sandy beaches, and take in an Erie sunset.

Whether you are looking for a family friendly atmosphere, a maritime history experience, or a casual business dinner, Erie will exceed your expectations. However you choose to spend your time with us, I know you will love Erie as much as I do. Enjoy your stay and visit often!

Sincerely,

Joseph E. Sinnott
Mayor





Welcome State Titleholders,

On behalf of the Ms. Wheelchair America Inc. Board of Directors, I would like to welcome you to Ms. Wheelchair America 2018, here in beautiful Erie, Pennsylvania. Are you ready for an amazing week? Are you ready to learn and share? I hope so. You will be challenged and changed.

Dr. Philip K. Wood saw challenge. He had devoted his career to rehabilitation, helping people use their talents, capabilities, and determination to be productive members of society. In 1972, he established Ms. Wheelchair America as a forum for change, a simple way for promoting the achievements and accomplishments of women who utilized wheelchairs for mobility. This year, as we crown the 46th Ms. Wheelchair America it is important we take a moment to thank Dr. Wood for his commitment.

This organization has challenged and changed countless people, including you. I want to congratulate you for all you have achieved to get here. You truly represent what Ms. Wheelchair America is all about. You will have the opportunity to show your talents, capabilities, determination and share your platform.

Behind the scenes of this amazing organization are the state coordinators. They keep this program running at the state level, without their time and commitment, you would not be here. Please help me thank them for their hard work and dedication, as well as, challenge them to continue the work started by Dr. Wood.

A very special thank you to Megan Abrams, the Ms. Wheelchair Pennsylvania organization and the amazing volunteers that have worked to make this week happen! Follow their example and continue to educate and advocate.

Finally, thanks to all of you for being here and helping us recognize and celebrate an amazing group of women!

Shelly Loose

President, Ms. Wheelchair America, Inc.

P.O. Box 86 – Byron Center, Michigan 49315
1-877-MSWHEEL (679-4335)



Welcome to Erie!

Advocacy is a long and difficult journey, but it is so worthwhile.

All of you chose to continue, or even begin, your journey as an advocate when you entered your state pageant. This week will be filled with workshops and experiences that will teach you how to be a stronger, more effective advocate for whichever cause is lucky enough to garner your support. Talk with the other amazing and talented titleholders and Board members here about your advocacy journey. Ask them about their journeys, personal or professional. I can guarantee that each one will have something to offer that you hadn't thought of before.

Planning this experience for you has taught me a lot about my own journey. I've found myself talking to people I never would have, asking for more help than I'm comfortable asking for and doing things I never thought I could do. I've learned that it's not a bad thing to ask for help and that it's perfectly fine to delegate responsibility. There are just some things you can't do all by yourself.

My amazing family and friends deserve all the thanks in the world. They have really helped me to pull this all together. Many of them are the volunteers you'll see running around here this week, helping to keep things running smoothly so that all of you beautiful ladies will have the best experience possible.

Only one person will wear the crown home at the end of the week, but you are all winners. You've accomplished so much to get where you are today and there is so much more advocating left to be done.

Don't let your journey end here!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Megan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Megan Abrams
Ms. Wheelchair Pennsylvania State Coordinator

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Vice President	Mary Zendejas
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Alabama	Michele Miller
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Tennessee	Bliss Welch
Texas	Amanda Hall
Utah	Kim Belliston
Virginia	Emily McGrail
Washington	Julie Broadwell
Wisconsin	Carol Banks
Delegate Mentor	Mary Zendejas

2017 Independent Delegates

Connecticut	Shannon Mazurick
Indiana	LesMarie Hacker



Ms. Wheelchair America Titleholders

1973	Patricia Nevins	Michigan	1996	Amy Baxter-Ley	Texas
1974	Caryl Jane Robinson	Texas	1997	Elaine Stefanowicz	Washington
1975	Diana Kenderian	New Jersey	1998	Terri Cecil	Kentucky
1976	Dixie Lee Etheridge	Mississippi	1999	Christina Gilmore	Wisconsin
1977	Beverly Chapman	Florida	2000	Tracy Charlton-O'Connor	South Dakota
1978	Margie Sloan	Georgia	2001	Nicki Ard	South Carolina
1979	Marge Chmielewski	Michigan	2002	Candy Marsh	Colorado
1980	Nancy Pudvin	Georgia	2003	Catherine Gugala	Wisconsin
1981	Vivienne Thompson	Massachusetts	2004	Cinda Hughes	Oklahoma
1982	Marian Schooling-Vessels	Maryland	2005	Juliette Rizzo	Maryland
1983	Barbara Crozier	Alabama	2006	Kristen Connors	Rhode Island
1984	Gaynell Colburn	Maryland	2007	Autumn Grant	Massachusetts
1985	Lori Cottam	Utah	2008	Kristen McCosh	Massachusetts
1986	Donna Cline	Nevada	2009	Michelle Colvard	Texas
1987	Sandra Honbaier	North Carolina	2010	Erika Bogan	North Carolina
1988	Peggy Simpson	Alabama	2011	Alexandra McArthur	North Carolina
1989	Jewell Massey	Georgia	2012	Josie Badger	Pennsylvania
1990	Kathy Garcia Farnsworth	Utah	2013	Mariah Kilbourne	Texas
1991	Mercedes Rodriguez-Fowler	Florida	2014	Jennifer Adams	Washington
1992	Deanna VanHook	Texas	2015	Samantha Schroth	Wisconsin
1993	Kim Mensi	Alabama	2016	Alette Coble-Temple	California
1994	Dawn Blodgett	California	2017	Eliza McIntosh-Stauffer	Utah
1995	Wendy Petzold	Wisconsin			



History

In 1972 Dr. Phillip K. Wood of Columbus, Ohio had devoted his career to treating and rehabilitating persons with functional impairments. During his practice, he became aware of the talents, capabilities, determination, and courage of persons with disabilities. As a result, he established Ms. Wheelchair America as a forum for promoting the achievements and accomplishments of women who utilize wheelchairs for mobility, as well as the needs of all persons with mobility challenges.

The mission of Ms. Wheelchair America is to provide an opportunity of achievement for women who happen to be wheelchair users to successfully educate and advocate for the more than 56 million Americans living with disabilities. The Ms. Wheelchair America Program is in no way a traditional beauty contest.

Purpose and Goals

Each year the Ms. Wheelchair America Program holds a competition to select the most accomplished, articulate spokeswoman for people with disabilities. The titleholder must be able to communicate and educate the public, business community, and lawmakers regarding the dignity, productiveness, and basic value of people with disabilities. Ms. Wheelchair America continues to eliminate the architectural and attitudinal barriers that prevent people with disabilities from assuming their rightful place in society.

Ms. Wheelchair America has numerous duties. During her reign she has the opportunity to travel, visit advocacy groups, make public appearances, and conduct interviews. Ms. Wheelchair America promotes her chosen platform in a variety of settings. She serves as a positive role model for the next generation of Americans with disabilities, inspiring them to leave their own legacy. Her commitment and personal example serves to further the mission of Ms. Wheelchair America.

This pageant is made up of a multitude of activities. These activities allow the judging panel time with the state titleholders, while enabling the competitors an opportunity to share with each other and develop friendships. They become stronger advocates throughout the week because of the variety of interesting workshops that strengthen them. The workshops develop skills that heighten awareness on issues within the community, and are designed to open a dialogue between the women about their thoughts, ideas, values, and experiences.

Ms. Wheelchair America, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, is staffed and coordinated solely by volunteers from many different community organizations, businesses, private citizens, and previous titleholders. It is through the monetary and in-kind support of many sponsors that the national titleholder is able to fulfill her duties throughout the year and travel across the country with her message of empowerment for people with disabilities. The Ms. Wheelchair America Program is actively seeking volunteers and sponsors and would appreciate any support that is offered.

MS. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA CREED

**As Ms. Wheelchair America, I promise to do my best
to promote public awareness of people with disabilities,
to use my time and efforts to this purpose,
to strive to achieve the best that is within me,
to offer my hand in friendship to everyone I meet,
to be cheerful, honest and loving,
to give hope to the less fortunate,
to set an example by my attitude,
and to do all this with grace, warmth and dignity.**



A farewell message from Eliza McIntosh-Stauffer, Ms. Wheelchair America 2017

I grew up with a disability, but I never knew it was supposed to stop or define me. I knew it got me stares from adults, and curiosity from kids. I knew people noticed me from a distance, or the second I got into the room. When I was younger, that really bothered me. I wanted to be seen first, instead of my wheelchair. My mother called me out on it. She said it was silly to be depressed about something that would happen my whole life. She said I had a choice. I could either let it stop me, or not. I could hate the attention my wheelchair brought, or I could use it. There was no guidebook for how to do it, no magical moment where I was suddenly totally comfortable and knew exactly what to say. That's not how activism works. Being an activist isn't a job you sign up for. It's a decision you make every single day. It's deciding to use the opportunities that come your way. It's about choosing to speak up and speak out about a passion. It's about using your differences to better the world.

Entering Ms Wheelchair Utah was a completely new experience for me. I'd never even considered being in a pageant. I grew up playing chess and sports, not playing with makeup or dresses. All I knew about was the frou frou stuff I'd seen in movies and that felt nothing like me. What I was interested in, however, was politics and advocacy. In 2015, I was chosen to be on a Zoos, Arts and Parks Committee. I got to work with five mayors and many State department heads on approving new facilities and projects for the county. I was the youngest on the Committee by over two decades and yet, because of my disability, I had an opportunity for leadership. Because of my life experience as a wheelchair user, and basic knowledge of ADA regulations, I was suddenly, and unexpectedly a voice of authority in government proceedings. It was bizarre and exhilarating. I was an advocate, even though I never intended to be. I was an advocate because of my differences. I was an advocate, *because I showed up*. This was a new



concept to me, a new opportunity. So I capitalized on it. I became a delegate in my state, so I'd have an opportunity to talk to politicians about better accessibility. I signed up for Ms. Wheelchair Utah, because I figured I might meet others who were doing the same thing. Even if not, I figured that if I won, maybe I could get a few more doors to open for the issues I cared most about. I thought I knew what I was signing up for. I didn't.

I had no idea the opportunities that would come my way once I gave myself the excuse to commit myself to advocacy. I had no idea about the sisterhood that I was joining, or the power there was behind them.

I'm just a 22-year-old college girl. I have no formal training in disability advocacy. The only advocacy network I have is the one I gained by going to the National Pageant. I traveled to 15 states, and three countries during my reign, and stayed on people's couches, spare beds or donated hotel rooms every time except for once. Most of the time, the first time I met them was when they picked me up from the airport. We didn't know each other, but we were bonded by the same drive for advocacy and the same dreams, and that was enough. The advocates I met in all of the states I visited were passionate people, using their differences and strengths to make the world a better place, with or without a crown.

This pageant is not about who wins. It's about coming together as advocates and working as a sisterhood to see real progress in our states. To pool resources and think tank our way to solving problems. Only one woman wheels away with a crown, but everyone receives training on how to advocate. This pageant will be what you make it. You can use the opportunities that come with it... or not.





Ms. Wheelchair Alabama 2017

Whitney Ford

Whitney lives in Huntsville, Alabama and is a student at Calhoun Community College. She will receive her Associate Degree at Calhoun Community College in 2018. Whitney enjoys writing poetry, singing, and creating things. She has Spina Bifida. Whitney describes herself as creative, confident, and ambitious.

Ms. Wheelchair Arizona 2017

Josette Ulibarri

Josette lives in Phoenix, Arizona and is a telecommunications consultant at Telecom National. She obtained her Life Coach Certification from Life Impact LLC. Josette enjoys traveling, swimming, and skydiving. She has Tetrachomelia. Josette describes herself as unlimited, brave, and determined.



Ms. Wheelchair Arkansas 2017

Tiffany Allen

Tiffany lives in Mt. Ida, Arkansas and volunteers as an aid at Mt. Ida Middle School in the fifth and sixth grade English classes. She has studied at National Park Community College. Tiffany enjoys her two beautiful children, Bryce and Ollie Briar, and music. She has a spinal cord injury. Tiffany describes herself as passionate, debonair, and an achiever.



Ms. Wheelchair California 2017

Tayloure Richardson

Tayloure lives in Palmdale, California and works at, Operation Confidence, a non-profit organization that provides services and support for disabled veterans and those with disabilities. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology at California State University, Northridge. Tayloure enjoys shopping, volunteering, and being around family. She has Osteogenesis Imperfecta. Tayloure describes herself as tenacious, outspoken, and compassionate.

Ms. Wheelchair Colorado 2017

Jordanne Menzies

Jordanne lives in Grand Junction, Colorado and is a business owner and volunteer with Girl Scouts. She received her Associate of Arts in Early Childhood Education at Colorado Mesa University. Jordanne enjoys watching television, listening to music, and playing board games. She has a spinal cord injury. Jordanne describes herself as compassionate, strong, and ambitious.



Ms. Wheelchair Connecticut 2017

Shannon Mazurick

Shannon lives in Avon, Connecticut and is the proud author of six different books as well as an artist. She obtained her Master of Science in Interactive Media at Quinnipiac University. Shannon enjoys artwork, writing, and staying active. She has Cerebral Palsy. Shannon describes herself as creative, determined, and hard-working.



Ms. Wheelchair Florida 2017

Katherine Magnoli

Katherine lives in Sunny Isles Beach, Florida and is a published children's book author of *The Adventures of KatGirl*, a public speaker, and a co-host for the online radio show *Brain Matters*. She received her Associate of Arts degree for Exceptional Student Education at Miami Dade College. Katherine enjoys writing, surfing, and arts and crafts. She has Spina Bifida. Katherine describes herself as determined, enthusiastic, and helpful.

Ms. Wheelchair Illinois 2017

Shannon Webster

Shannon lives in Naperville, Illinois and works as a Recruiting Programs Specialist at Exelon in Chicago. She obtained her degree in Communications at Marquette University. Shannon enjoys spending time with her friends, family and fiancé Matt, scrapbooking, and watching movies. She has Cerebral Palsy. Shannon describes herself as hard-working, passionate, and joyful.



Ms. Wheelchair Indiana 2017

Lesamarie Hacker

Lesamarie lives in Bloomington, Indiana and volunteers at Indiana University Health Hospital. Lesamarie enjoys giving to others, spending time with family, and church fellowship. She has had two separate cerebrovascular accidents and, as a result, is unable to walk. Lesamarie describes herself as steadfast, compassionate, and outgoing.



Ms. Wheelchair Iowa 2017

Hannah Soyer

Hannah lives in Iowa City, Iowa and works for The Daily Iowan. She received her degrees in Journalism and English at the University of Iowa. Hannah enjoys writing, laughing, and advocating for the rights of her fellow Americans. She has Spinal Muscular Atrophy. Hannah describes herself as compassionate, creative, and determined.

Ms. Wheelchair Kansas 2017

Deb Young

Deb lives in Lawrence, Kansas and volunteers at two elementary schools. She obtained several degrees in the fields of Education and Educational Leadership at Truman State, Emporia State, Pittsburg State, and Kansas University. Deb enjoys people, watching sports, and working with children. She was in a car accident and is now a triple amputee. Deb describes herself as strong willed, compassionate, and independent.



Ms. Wheelchair Kentucky 2017

Beth Bryant

Beth lives in Louisville, Kentucky and volunteers at the Spina Bifida Association. She studied at Jefferson Community College. Beth enjoys volunteering, playing wheelchair basketball, and crafting jewelry. She has Spina Bifida. Beth describes herself as willing, determined, and stubborn.



Ms. Wheelchair Maryland 2017

Keyonna Mayo

Keyonna lives in Baltimore, Maryland and is peer mentor in the community as well as the creator of her own clothing line named Keyonna's Unique Designs, and the creator and CEO of an entertainment business named Royal Crush Entertainment. She obtained her Bachelor of Science in Human Ecology with an emphasis in Child Development. Keyonna enjoys hanging out with friends, reading, and teaching classes for newly injured people. She has a spinal cord injury. Keyonna describes herself as open-minded, hard-working, and outgoing.

Ms. Wheelchair Michigan 2017

Andrenia Wright

Andrenia lives in Goodells, Michigan and is involved with Team Access of St. Clair County, which helps ensure that public places are accessible. She studied Psychology at Lacrosse University. Andrenia enjoys singing, playing piano, and helping others. She has respiratory insufficiency, spinal stenosis and inflammatory arthritis. Andrenia describes herself as patient, empathetic, and ambitious.



Ms. Wheelchair Minnesota 2017

Sheri Melander-Smith

Sheri lives in Chanhassen, Minnesota and serves as a volunteer in the community helping individuals with disabilities live their best life. She earned her Master of Business Administration at the University of St. Thomas. Sheri enjoys spending time with her son Oliver, painting, and reading. She has a spinal cord injury. Sheri describes herself as happy, creative, and fun-loving.



Ms. Wheelchair Mississippi 2017

Rebecca Sentell

Rebecca lives in Madison, Mississippi and works at the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services as a Supported Employment Counselor. She received her Master of Science in Addiction Counseling at Mississippi College. Rebecca enjoys going to church, spending time with her family and friends, and playing with her three fur-babies. She has Spina Bifida. Rebecca describes herself as resilient, positive, and compassionate.

Ms. Wheelchair Nevada 2017

Tammy Townsend

Tammy lives in Las Vegas, Nevada and has volunteered with Easter Seals, United Cerebral Palsy of Southern Nevada, the Nevada Association for the Handicapped, and the New Vista Ranch. She studied Spanish and Computer Skills at the Community College of Southern Nevada. Tammy enjoys crafts, music, and eating out. She has Cerebral Palsy. Tammy describes herself as caring, outgoing, and stubborn.



Ms. Wheelchair North Carolina 2017

Deja Barber

Deja lives in Raleigh, North Carolina and works at the YMCA of the Triangle as an afterschool tutor. She received her degree in Education Studies at William Peace University. Deja enjoys sports, coloring, and reading. She has Cerebral Palsy. Deja describes herself as focused, driven, and outgoing.





Ms. Wheelchair Oklahoma 2017

Rose Ann Bolin

Rose Ann lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma and volunteers at the Tulsa Cancer Institute of America. She obtained her Practical Theology Degree at Christ for the Nations Institute in Dallas, Texas. Rose Ann enjoys water sports, crafts, and baking. She has Cerebral Palsy. Rose Ann describes herself as faithful, determined, and adventurous.

Ms. Wheelchair Pennsylvania 2017

Claire Senita

Claire lives in Gibsonia, Pennsylvania and works with Journey Forward Pittsburgh. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Business Management and Finance at Curry College. Claire enjoys singing, painting, and playing wheelchair rugby. She has a spinal cord injury. Claire describes herself as dedicated, inquisitive, and silly.



Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee 2017

Andrea Klein

Andrea lives in Cleveland, Tennessee and works with Life Care Centers of America, Inc. She obtained her Bachelor of Science in English and Journalism at Tennessee Technological University. Andrea enjoys photography, cooking, and shopping. She has Muscular Dystrophy. Andrea describes herself as detail-oriented, determined, and talkative.



Ms. Wheelchair Texas 2017

Kendra Willis

Kendra lives in Houston, Texas and is a substitute teacher at Galena Park and Pasadena Intermediate School District. She has studied Education at Texas Southern University. Kendra enjoys fundraising, traveling, and baking. She has a spinal cord injury. Kendra describes herself as hard working, direct, and fun.

Ms. Wheelchair Virginia 2017

Allyson Hart

Allyson lives in Roanoke, Virginia and volunteers at Fellowship Community Church. She is studying General Studies at Virginia Western Community College. Allyson enjoys yoga, arts and crafts, and writing. She has Spastic Quadriplegia Hypertension. Allyson describes herself as strong, loving, and independent.



Ms. Wheelchair Washington 2017

Kyann Flint

Kyann lives in Blaine, Washington and volunteers at The Max Higbee Center. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Humanities at Western Washington University. Kyann enjoys traveling, the outdoors, and spending time with friends. She has Hereditary Spastic Paraplegia, Hereditary Neuropathy with Liability to Pressure Palsy, and legal blindness. Kyann describes herself as witty, attentive, and ethical.



Ms. Wheelchair Wisconsin 2017

Myranda Gereau

Myranda lives in Plymouth, Wisconsin and volunteers at Sharon Richardson Hospice. She is studying Human Services at University of Wisconsin – Sheboygan. Myranda enjoys cooking, drawing, and hanging out with her sister. She has Bethlem Myopathy. Myranda describes herself as outgoing, determined, and humorous.

**"The best way
to predict your
future is to
create it."**

**- Abraham
Lincoln**

Awards

Ms. Wheelchair America 2018

Ms. Wheelchair America 2018 is chosen by the judging panel. The contestant that earns the highest total score during the judging sessions will become Ms. Wheelchair America 2018.

Lifetime Achievement Award

The Lifetime Achievement Award is chosen by the judges and given to the contestant that they believe has made the largest contribution and significant impact for people with disabilities.

Nicki Ard Achievement Award

The Nicki Ard Achievement Award recipient is chosen by the judges and awarded to the woman who exemplifies the philosophy of Nicki Ard, which is to “always exhibit a positive attitude and be willing to serve others.” The delegate receiving this award will have made an outstanding contribution to the disability community through her talents, her efforts, and her example.

The Outstanding Speech Award

The Outstanding Speech Award is chosen by those in attendance on speech night. Each individual attending receives one vote to cast for the contestant that feel delivered the most memorable speech of the evening.

The People’s Choice Award

The People’s Choice Award is presented to the contestant who receives the most votes. Votes cost \$1.00 each and can be purchased during the week of the pageant. Forty percent of the funds raised will be distributed to the award recipient’s Ms. Wheelchair State Program while the remaining funds will go into a Ms. Wheelchair America 2018 Companion Travel Fund.

The Congeniality Award

The Congeniality Award is chosen by the contestants. Each contestant cast one vote for the person that they feel was kindest, friendliest, most helpful, and caring throughout the week.

The Business Award

The Business Award is chosen by the various businesses that present workshops, attend events, or interact with the contestants. This award will be given to the contestant that the businesses feel was able to communicate on a variety of topics.

Judges



Head Judge - Carl Daughtery

Carl E. Daughtery is a native of North Little Rock, Arkansas. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from Philander Smith College in Little Rock, and earned a Master's Degree in Public Administration in 2001 from Webster University in Jacksonville, Arkansas. He also graduated from the University of Arkansas Currents Leadership Institute in 2005. Mr. Daughtery is a 20-year employee for the state of Arkansas.

In addition to his education, Mr. Daughtery has an exemplary background in business and public relation. Before being appointed to his present position of Chief of Field Service in August 2009, Mr. Daughtery served as the Interim Chief of Field Services. He previously served as District Manager for five years in the Vocational Rehabilitation Field Services Program covering North Little Rock, Conway, Russellville, and Lonoke field offices. Mr. Daughtery has over 6 years' experience of judging Ms. Wheelchair Arkansas in the natural state. He also was a judge for Ms. Wheelchair America 2012. Mr. Daughtery is on the core curriculum board for Vocational Rehabilitation Education for University of Arkansas Little Rock and Arkansas Tech University. Mr. Daughtery is member of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Core Planning Team. He leads the Transition Committee and is a member of the Policy, Core Measures, and Sector Strategies Committee. Mr. Daughtery is a core member of National Technical Assistance Center of Transition. He is a 13-year member of the National Rehabilitation Association, Arkansas Rehabilitation Association and National Association of Multicultural Rehabilitation Concerns. He is a current member of the Arkansas Advisory Council for the Education of Children with Disabilities.

Mr. Daughtery and his wife, Cynthia, have one son, Carl Jr., and one daughter, Gecara. He plays a very active role as husband and father. As Chief of Field Services, he is committed to providing leadership and guidance to Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and advocating for people with disabilities to become independent and employed.



Josie Badger

Dr. Josie Badger received her Bachelor's degree from Geneva College in Disability Law and Advocacy, a Master's from the University of Pittsburgh in Rehabilitation Counseling, and a Doctorate from Duquesne University in Healthcare Ethics. In 2014 Josie founded J Badger Consulting Inc. Josie works at the PEAL Center as the Youth Development Director, assisting youth in transition and leadership development. She is the Co-Director of the national RSA- Parent Training and Information Center technical assistance center (RAISE). She is also the campaign manager of the #IWantToWork Campaign, to improve employment of youth with

disabilities. In 2012, Dr. Badger was crowned Ms. Wheelchair America. Previously, at the national level, she worked with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention as an author for the book *Launching into Adulthood* and she served as president and vice president of the National Youth Leadership Network. On the state level, Josie was a founding member and president of the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network (PYLN) and the Children's Hospital Advisory Network for Guidance and Empowerment (CHANGE).

Judges



Denise DiNoto

Denise DiNoto is a licensed speech-language pathologist, writer and disability advocate. She is employed as the Communications and Outreach Specialist at Consumer Directed Choices (Albany, NY) and spends her work days promoting self-direction and independence for people with disabilities.

In 2000, Denise read an article about then current Ms. Wheelchair America, Nicki Ard and applied to become an Independent Delegate from her home state, New York. She was named First Runner Up at Ms. Wheelchair America 2002. This began her involvement with MWA. Denise has served the organization as State Coordinator of New York (2002-2013); Secretary (2003-2005; 2007-2009; 2010-2011); Vice President (2009-2010); and Executive Director (2005-2007). She is honored to be serving as a judge, one of the few jobs she has never performed at a national pageant.

A former Rotary Youth Exchange Student, Denise is now a proud Rotarian and is President of the Colonie-Guilderland Rotary Club. She is also a member of the Stratton VA Toastmasters and Past President of The College of Saint Rose Alumni Association. Denise shares her writing on her blog: www.deedescribesblog.wordpress.org.



Robert Mecca

Robert Mecca is the Executive Director for Life and Independence for Today (LIFT). LIFT is a Center for Independent Living in St. Marys, Pennsylvania that aims to empower people with disabilities. Along with 28 years of experience empowering people with disabilities and working in the field of Independent Living, Robert has also managed to build connections in the disability community through his role as a wheelchair basketball player.

After earning his degree in accounting from the Hiram G. Andrews Center, Robert returned to his hometown and began searching for activities that individuals with disabilities could participate in. His drive to stay active in the community led him to create The Allegheny Mountain Rollin' Thunder Wheelchair Basketball team, which thrived in Pennsylvania for 17 years. Today, Robert is happily married to his wife Dawn and says, "I am living the dream, I just do it sitting down!"

Judges

Christina Thomas



Christina Thomas is of Northern Paiute, Western Shoshone, and Hopi descent. Her given Hopi name is Dawa Kutsmana, meaning Sweet Corn Young Woman. She grew up on the Pyramid Lake Paiute Indian Reservation in Wadsworth, Nevada and is an enrolled member of the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony. Christina taught Northern Paiute for the Washoe County School District from 2010-2015. She now works at the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony as a Paiute Language Instructor working with children teaching language and culture.

Christina keeps busy with numerous organizations and volunteers her time in her community. Besides volunteering much of her time and being an Ambassador of her people, Christina has also been on the pageant scene. In 2009 she ran for Miss Indian World where she was a standout for her public speaking and singing. In 2010 she ran for Miss Indian Nations where she placed 1st Runner-Up and received the Tribal Chairman's Choice Award. Christina also decided to try her luck in a mainstream pageant. In October 2012 she became the person to represent the USA at the Miss Humanity International Pageant. She came home with the coveted Beauty on a Mission Award and Continental Queen of the Americas.

After taking some time off from school to travel, volunteer, and compete in pageants, Christina decided it was time to return to her studies. Once she had her son Jace in January 2016 Christina returned to the University of Nevada, Reno to finish her degrees. She is majoring in both Biology and Music. She plans to go to dental school and is being trained classically in Voice.

Besides being a teacher of her language Christina is also an accomplished traditional singer and dancer. She has performed for the former First Lady Michele Obama, Joe Biden, Senator Harry Reid, and Governor Sandoval along with numerous Nevada representatives.

**"FOCUS ON THE JOURNEY, NOT THE
DESTINATION. JOY IS FOUND NOT IN
FINISHING AN ACTIVITY BUT IN DOING IT."
- GREG ANDERSON**



Celebrating
Pat O'Bryant

Ms. Wheelchair

K
Kentucky

*Thank
You!*



20 years as the Kentucky State Coordinator!

2017 Titleholder Sponsors

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William Fearn
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Ms. Wheelchair Arizona

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- Unknown

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— MARGARET
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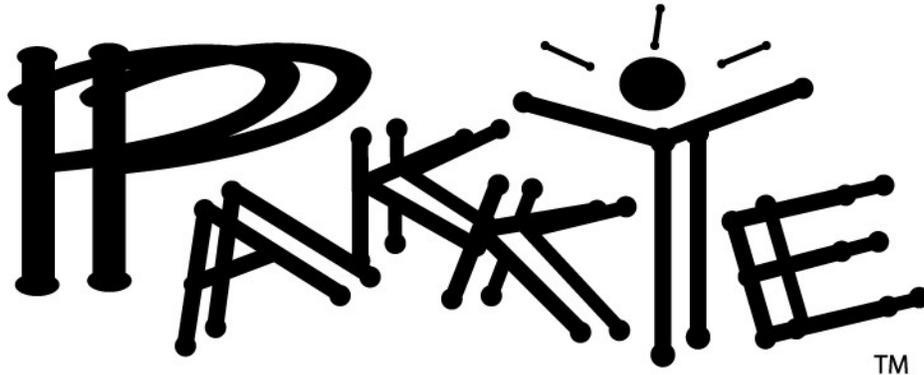
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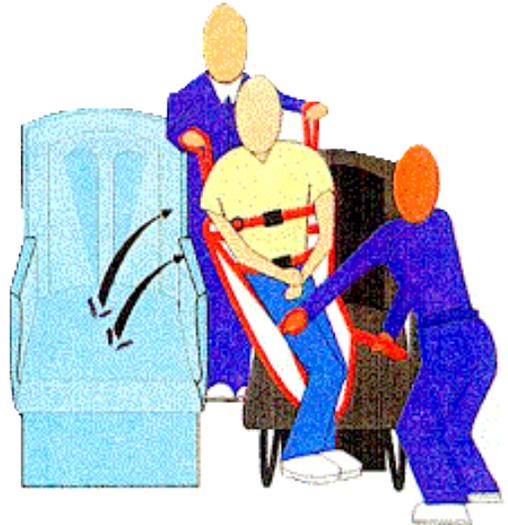


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When my wife and I took our daughter, who was three at the time, to see Disney on Ice several years ago, I felt the greatest sense of professional fulfillment that I'd ever experienced. Seated across the front row of the arena were several children in wheelchairs, each right beside parents and friends. They were laughing and having the best time. Clearly, it was a very special experience for the children and their families – and I had played a small part in making it happen.

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