

Crowning achievements

Catholic girl wins title, continues helping others

by KATHLEEN HEALY SCHMIEDER

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HENDERSONVILLE — At 14, Lauren Gentile has a plan. She also has a crown, a title and a scholarship, which she hopes are just the beginning of her realizing her dreams.

As the 2009 North Carolina Junior National Teenager winner, Lauren proved to be well rounded in all categories during the pageant competition in Charlotte March 20-21.

And as a parishioner of Immaculate Conception Church in Hendersonville for the last three years, Lauren has devoted her time to helping others as well as pursuing her own goals.

“There’s a lot going on. I’ve got schoolwork, volunteer work and my crown duties,” she said.

Her duties include an upcoming tea at an orphanage in Charlotte, where the winners from all divisions of the American National Teenager Scholarship Organization will meet with girls at the facility and “adopt” little sisters for the day.

“It makes me feel good when I see people smile,” Lauren said. “When I would go out with this one woman at the Life Care Center, we would read and I could see how doing the smallest things to help people makes a difference.”

Life Care Center offers residential, rehabilitation and recovery services for the elderly and patients.

In addition to volunteering at the Life Care Center, Lauren assists with her parish’s Children’s Church, which shares Sunday’s readings with 3-, 4- and 5-year-old children, and at the Mainstay resale shop, which benefits domestic abuse victims.

Last year Lauren and her mother spent a week working with a multid denominational summer camp program in which Immaculate Conception Church participated with other local churches.

Her father, Larry Gentile, recently accompanied Lauren to an audition at Hendersonville Little Theatre, where Lauren won a role in “Gypsy.” And, at her urging, Larry found himself onstage singing and acting for the first time since high school.

Lauren also has worked at the Flat Rock Playhouse in their production of “Orphan Train” and hopes to continue studying acting with the playhouse.

“In high school I would like to be part of the conservatory group at the playhouse. You get a taste of what it’s like to be an equity actor,” she said.

Lauren's goals also include studying for her bachelor's degree in musical theatre at Elon University. She is currently an honor student and Beta Group member at Rugby Middle School, and her mother, Mary, hopes the academic achievements continue to be important.

Additionally, Lauren will compete for the national crown in July.

Lauren's family offers her continuous support. Her singing is accompanied by the talents of her older brothers, Lawrence and Christopher, as well as her father.

"Her father plays piano, Lawrence plays standup bass and Christopher plays the drums," said Mary Gentile.

"Her brother Christopher acted as her escort for one of the gown portions of a previous pageant," she said, "and both her brothers are very proud of her. And her dad is busting at the seams."

"We are a loving family, and I think that has a lot to do with our faith," added her mother. "We try to raise our children with the same Catholic values we were brought up with."

"Church keeps me going," said Lauren, who is currently studying for her confirmation in the fall.

When she won the North Carolina Junior National Teenager title and scholarship, Lauren also won the talent portion of the program and won for her speech about setting good examples for other teens.

Following in the footsteps of the Franciscans at Immaculate Conception Church, Lauren said her work within the community follows the admonition of St. Francis himself: "Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words."