

Miss Deaf Utah Pageant

**Written & Compiled by Jodi B. Kinner
Edited by Valerie G. Kinney & Andrea Anderson**

2012

The National Association of the Deaf initiated the Miss Deaf America Pageant (MDAP) in 1972 with the dual purpose of providing young, talented Deaf women the opportunity to assume leadership roles in the society of the Deaf, and of conveying Deaf Awareness to the public in the representative winner of the pageant. In 1978, with those purposes in mind, David Mortensen, president of the Utah Association for the Deaf, appointed Adele Sigoda as chairperson and got the 1979 Miss Deaf Utah Pageant committee going. Adele assumed the position of director for the 1981 pageant, with Louise Wilkins as chairperson (The Miss Deaf Utah Story).

At the 1979 committee meeting, David Mortensen broached the idea of sponsors for the contestants. The committee was not receptive to the idea, citing problems of putting the girls and organizations together. During the year of 1983, this idea was revived and was given its chance. It had succeeded to a moderate degree, as each girl had a sponsor, one way or another.

Sponsors were heartily recommended because they gave the girls morale support, advice, and ideas that they could never have otherwise on their own (The Miss Deaf Utah Story).

From the beginning, the committee meetings were held in various places, such as the Salt Lake County council chamber, the conference rooms of St. Benedict's Hospital in Ogden, and Copper Mountain Mental Health Center in Murray, Utah. The committee



W. David Mortensen, president of Utah Association of the Deaf

eventually met regularly at the Utah Community Center for the Deaf in Bountiful, Utah (The Miss Deaf Utah Story).



Adele Sigoda, chairperson of the 1979 Miss Deaf Utah Pageant

While David Mortensen was helping Adele Sigoda get the MDUP underway in 1979, Kristi was secretly preparing for the pageant as a contestant with help from her grandma, Maxie Christiansen, with clothes and Dora B. Laramie with talent and speaking skills. David and Shanna did not know their daughter entered the MDUP as a contestant until just a few weeks before the pageant in November. When David realized that his daughter was one of the contestants, he told Adele that he could not be one of the judges due to a conflict of interest. Fortunately, Adele

was able to find a replacement (Kristi Mortensen, personal communication, March 28, 2009). Kristi won and was crowned as Miss Deaf Utah.

At the appreciation dinner in 1981, Adele announced her resignation so that she could spend time with her new family.

So, by election, Shirley Snow and Barbara Bass became state director and chairperson, respectively (The Miss Deaf Utah Story).

Heidi Ercanbrack, the 1983 Miss Deaf Utah, set her wedding date a week after the 1983 pageant, held on June 11. However, the mudslide and flood situation in Bountiful, Utah forced the pageant to be postponed. The mudslide



Kristi Mortensen, 1st Miss Deaf Utah

impacted the Utah Community Center for the Deaf, but this did not stop Heidi from marrying on schedule. On June 18th, she became the bride of Clark Gaudette (Kristi Mortensen, personal communication, March 28, 2009).

After M. Kayleen Pugh was crowned as Miss Deaf Utah in 1985, she immediately went to Western Maryland College to work toward her master's degree in Deaf education over the summer. Then in August of that year, she was offered a job at the Alabama School for the Deaf to teach mathematics (Kristi Mortensen, personal communication, March 28, 2009).



Kay (Kinner) Curtis, a former director of Miss Deaf Utah Pageant

After the construction of Robert G. Sanderson Community Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Taylorsville, Utah was completed in 1992, MDUP meetings continued to be held at the there (Kristi

Mortensen, personal communication, March 28, 2009).

Through the first two pageants, most contestants were in their early twenties and currently college students. At the time, most girls were younger and had just graduated from high school. Moreover, most of them acquired Deafness from the rubella epidemic (The Miss Deaf Utah Story).

All proceeds were raised by the Miss Deaf Utah Pageant and MDUP fund-raisers helped pay for all expenses for Miss Deaf



Katrina (Pickett) Lee, a former 1993 Miss Deaf Utah

Utah, her chaperone and the scholarship fund (The Miss Deaf Utah Story).

In 1995, Kay (Kinner) Curtis received a Presidential Award from Utah Association for the Deaf in recognition of her dedication in serving as MDUP State Director for two pageants.

Shirley Snow served as State Director longer than any other directors, she served



Eleanor McCowan, representative of Miss Deaf Utah Pageant

for six pageants. It was at Kansas City, where National Association of the Deaf(NAD)/Miss Deaf America Program (MDAP) was held in 2004, that Shirley Snow and Kristi Mortensen attended the State Directors' Meeting with MDAP officials, that the ideas of Miss Deaf Ambassador was born, but discussions were put off till the next NAD/MDAP in 2006 in California. In 2006, discussions were continued about changing Miss Deaf America to Miss Deaf Ambassador due to

the dwindling numbers of girls. Most girls from mainstreamed program did not know what NAD and MDAP were all about and what they represented (Kristi Mortensen, personal communication, March 28, 2009).

While the new changes were still up in the air, Andrea Anderson, a former Miss Deaf Idaho and who had been involved with seven different pageants as a contestant and a judge, was chosen as the State Director of the Miss Deaf Utah Ambassador in 2007 (Andrea Anderson, personal communication, January 2, 2013).

In the summer of 2007 at the Miss Deaf America program in New Orleans, many state directors liked the idea of changing from Miss Deaf America to Miss Deaf Ambassador and they voted on the change of terminology from Miss Deaf Utah Pageant

was changed to Miss Deaf Utah Ambassadorship Program (Andrea Anderson, 2013). Two Utah representatives, Katrina (Pickett) Lee, a former 1993 Miss Deaf Utah and Eleanor McCowan, witnessed the changes being finalized. Kristi Mortensen shared that, “This was the new era; Miss Deaf Utah Ambassador had brought a lot of flavor to the state of Utah. In addition, it was a new dawn of a brighter day where many young girls from mainstreamed programs feel they were part of a great program to build self-esteem, enrich personal talents, improve public speaking skills, and influence young girls for the future” (Kristi Mortensen, personal communication, March 28, 2009).



Andrea Anderson, a former Miss Deaf Idaho (MagicValley.com)

Under the direction of Andrea, she directed two Miss Deaf Utah Ambassadorship Programs with more than 10 workshops and two overnight retreats respectively for each pageant. With help of MDUAP treasurer, Kelli Fletcher found a grant of \$20,000 that was donated towards MDUAP. The program in 2009 had 15 interested contestants, and

7 qualified for the program. During the same year, she received the honor of the Presidential Award from UAD for her leadership with the program and reestablishing the program (Andrea Anderson, person communication, January 2, 2013).



Miss Deaf Utah Princess, 2010 with Miss Deaf Utah, Andrea Vigil

In 2010, Andrea established the first ever “Miss Deaf Utah

Princess,” inviting young girls age 6-8 to compete in the pageant. It was so successful that it was established again in 2012.

In 2012, the National Association of the Deaf decided to change from Miss Deaf America Program to Youth National Ambassador Program. This new program allows Deaf or hard of hearing men and women, between the ages of 18 and 30, from anywhere across the nation, to compete and represent the NAD as one of the Youth National Ambassadors. Andrea was very sad to see the end of the NAD Miss Deaf America Program and the UAD Miss Deaf Utah Program. The last pageant in Utah was held in 2012.



Kayla Stubbs, Miss Deaf Utah Year of 2011-2012

Notes

Andrea Anderson, e-mail message sent to Jodi B. Kinner. January 2, 2013.

Kristi L. Mortensen, e-mail message sent to Jodi B. Kinner. March 28, 2009.

Bibliography

The Miss Deaf Utah Story. 1983.