



The Hawley WOT Miss Hawley and Little Miss Hawley Pageants: A Crowning Tradition



The First Miss Hawley Pageant winner Tracy Molstre Baxter.

By **JEN MILLER**
Staff Writer

The Hawley Women of Today (WOT) Scholarship Pageant has been a crowning tradition in Hawley since before Rodeo Fest week. It has outlived many fashion trends, from long-sleeved peasant and prairie dresses to cropped-top tulle skirt dresses. Since its dawn, 48 girls have been crowned Miss Hawley, many of those contestants also participated in the Little Miss Hawley pageant. While the WOT decided to hold the pageant earlier this spring, the contestants will still play an active role during Rodeo Fest. The Little Miss Hawley Pageant will remain a part of the Rodeo Fest lineup.

The WOT Miss Hawley Scholarship Pageant has attracted many contestants in the past for several reasons. “The pageant is a great scholarship opportunity for junior and senior girls in Hawley schools. It provides them with valuable life

skills such as interviewing, expressing their values on support and service to others, performing and talking to a group, and connecting with peers, judges, and WOT members,” WOT member Heidi Fiskness, who helped with the pageant for nine years, stated. “The WOT motto is that we ‘Leave the world a better place because we lived and served within it.’ We ask all the girls to share information about the service, tasks, or activities they’ve taken in their personal lives to follow that creed and motto. The pageant is a good way to highlight the service and support these girls provide to the community and to reward them for those actions.”

The pageant initially started in 1972 as a quest to find and crown a rodeo queen during the Hawley rodeo. The first rodeo queen was Mary Sather. The pageant continued for six summers, crowning Anette Jorgenson, Becki Williams, Lynette Cooper, Sherri Kluck, and Julie Gerhardson. In 1978, the



The WOT Little Miss Hawley Pageant that WOT President Addie Harms entered in second grade.

pageant fell into the hands of the Hawley WOT, who added a scholarship with the crown.

The First Miss Hawley Scholarship Pageant took the stage during the Jaycee Women’s second annual Bong Show in a crowded gym on a 90-degree July evening. The show started by introducing the eleven candidates, and the judges announced the winners following the fifteen “bona fide” Bong acts.

The very first Miss Hawley still lives in town and teaches at Hawley Elementary School. In 1978, judges voted Patti Hammer second runner-up, Vicki Petermann first runner-up, and Tracy Molstre (Baxter) Miss Hawley.

“I remember that Wahl Drug sponsored me, and we all rode on horses in the parade. There were many businesses in town then, and

they would do Crazy Days sidewalk sales, which would be a stepping stone to Rodeo Fest,” Tracy Baxter shared. “We spent the day in the Home Ec. room interviewing with the judges, practicing our talents, and I believe there was a luncheon. We probably wore our old prom dresses.”

Tracy Baxter isn’t the only teacher in Hawley who has worn the crown. In fact, she is one of four. In 1987, judges crowned Sheri (Dauner) Cook as Miss Hawley; in 2005, Genna (VanHavermaet) Underdahl; and in 2019, Tasha Meyer.

Since there were so many contestants during the first pageant, the girls performed their talents to the judges, who picked the top three to perform at the Bong Show. That evening, Chris Anderson (Berg) sang a song from “Annie” accom-

panied by Kari Mickelson on guitar. Patti Hammer played her French horn and Tracy shared her sewing skills. The July 1978 Herald article stated, “The Bong Show judges were very respectful toward the girls and made no motion toward the bong.”

“I was big into sewing back then. My grandma owned a fabric store, and she had taught me how to sew. I also learned through Mrs. Seaborg in Silver Lake 4-H, Home Ec., and FHA (Future Homemakers of America) and exhibited sewing projects at the Clay County Fair. I decided to do that as my talent for the pageant. I had dresses that I made displayed behind me as I talked about sewing. I wasn’t sure they would pick my talent because

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