

NEWS ::

[Print Article](#) [Email Article](#) [Share / Bookmark](#) [Buzz up!](#)

Evergreen Park woman lives real-life princess story

Comments

August 4, 2009

BY TANIA KARAS Correspondent

Before Erin O'Connor leaves her house each day, she dons a four-pointed diamond tiara and silk sash.

The Evergreen Park resident and graduate of Mother McAuley High School was recently crowned the 2009 Miss Illinois and will advance to the Miss America pageant Jan. 30 in Las Vegas.

» Click to enlarge image



Erin O'Connor, 20, of Evergreen Park, will compete in the Miss America pageant in January.
(Mary Compton/SouthtownStar)

"Some kids dream of being an astronaut," said O'Connor, 20. "But you don't really think you'd actually get the opportunity to do it. This is like flying to the moon for me.

"Last January, myself and my girlfriends ate ice cream together and watched Miss America on TV and we picked our favorite girl. This year, I'm going to be there. It's still so crazy and wonderful, and I'm so lucky."

Unlike many beauty pageant participants who begin competing as young as age 5, O'Connor has competed in only two pageants - the Miss Macomb contest in

Macomb, where she is a theater major and dance minor at Western Illinois University, and Miss Illinois.

She entered the Miss Macomb pageant in March as a way to spread awareness of skin cancer prevention. Her own mother died of melanoma in May 2007, and since then O'Connor has worked as an advocate for the American Cancer Society.

After winning Miss Macomb, she advanced to the Miss Illinois pageant June 20. Her pageant platform, "Take Care: Skin Cancer Education and Prevention," earned her a community service award from the Miss Illinois Scholarship Association in addition to her crown.

"She used to be the sunscreen queen - now it's me," said O'Connor of her late mother, Mary Kay O'Connor. "I think she would be very proud of me. I really do. And I know she's watching over me from heaven and she's going to be there with me till the end, win or lose."

O'Connor is no stranger to the spotlight. From second to eighth grade, she attended Mother McAuley's 99th Street Summer Theatre camp. In high school, she took major roles in all her school plays and musicals and was president of McAuley's chapter of the International Thespian Troupe her senior year. At WIU, she has performed in two dance shows annually and several Shakespearean plays.

Since winning the Miss Illinois crown, O'Connor has worked as a mentor for children through the Character Counts program and will host a benefit for the Children's Miracle Network, set for Oct. 30 in Chicago.

"I'm a busy worker bee," O'Connor said. "I enjoy working. I have a whole year I can devote entirely to personal goals. Not many people can say that. If I ever get tired, I just remind myself this is an amazing journey and I should be grateful."

O'Connor is taking the next year off school to make more than 200 appearances statewide in addition to preparing for the Miss America competition.

She wakes up at 5:30 a.m. daily and usually spends about five hours working with a fitness trainer or practicing ballet on pointe, her pageant talent. Then



The Secret to Getting Highly Discounted Cruise Tickets

The luxury, the excitement, the open sea ... a cruise... [More](#)

More Articles

- [Computer Slowing Down? What to Do About It](#)
- [Criminal justice jobs growing strong](#)
- [Turned Down for an Auto Loan? There are Options](#)
- [How to Keep Your PC Clean and Quick](#)

Advertising provided by: ARALifestyle.com

Loading Videos...

TOP STORIES ::

NEWS

[1 questioned in toddler's drowning](#)

BUSINESS

[Clunkers pile up at Southland car dealerships](#)

SPORTS

[Coyne called to national camp](#)

ENTERTAINMENT

[Among Apatow's boyish men, Mann stands out](#)

LIFESTYLES

['NYC Prep's' posse can spot a bargain](#)

Click here for
SEARCHCHICAGO
DAILY AUTO DEALS

SEARCHCHICAGO degrees

Search for degrees in Northwest Indiana

Area of Interest: *

Please select

- News
- Archive
- Burr Oak Cemetery
- Crestwood water
- Local Digest
- Elections
- Obituaries
- Opinion
- Soldiers' stories
- Swine flu
- Tinley Park Shooting
- Weather
- Columnists
- Kimberly Brehm
- Fran Eaton
- David Johnson
- Phil Kadner
- Marlene Lang
- Kristen McQueary
- Rich Miller
- Guy Tridgell



she often speaks at charity events, schools or ceremonies honoring U.S. troops.

"There are a lot of misconceptions about beauty pageants," O'Connor said. "It's not just a beauty competition. It's about spreading the spirit of volunteerism and making yourself a better person.

"At the end of the day, I'm still the same old Erin, I just have a title at the end. I don't want to spend the whole year trying to be something I'm not. I'm such a theater nerd - on my wall, I have a quote from Shakespeare, 'To thine own self be true.' And it might sound so cliché, but I live by it."

As in her past pageants, during Miss America, O'Connor will compete in four areas: individual interview, talent, swimsuit and evening gown.

When she needs help picking out an outfit, O'Connor consults her fashion-savvy older sister Eileen, 25. Her younger sister Caitlin, 19, lends her knowledge of politics, helping Erin answer questions on current events or politics.

Her father, Terry O'Connor, and soon-to-be stepmom, Mary Martin, have been supportive as well and will fly out to Las Vegas to see her compete for the Miss America title in January.

"I'm doing this in memory of my mom," O'Connor said. "She was such a hard worker, and she really believed in education. Being able to participate in a system that places such a high value on education honors her memory.

"No matter what happens, for the rest of my life, I'll be able to say I competed for Miss America."

RELATED BLOG POSTS

[Miss Tennessee Wins Miss Teen USA Pageant](#)

From MomLogic

[Miss Tennessee Wins Miss Teen USA Pageant](#)

From MomLogic

The views expressed in these blog posts are those of the author and not of the SouthtownStar.

Class location:*

Online Campus

Your level of education:*

Please select

Zip Code:*

[FIND A DEGREE NOW](#)

Check Prices



Canon EOS Rebel T1i
Price: **\$783.00**



Canon EOS Rebel XSi
Price: **\$569.95**



Nikon D90 Black SLR
Price: **\$1129.00**



Samsung UN55B8000 55"
Price: **\$2449.95**