

ARTS & PEOPLE
LIVING

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Renoval High School graduate Christina Maxwell, of Fairview, is the national winner of the Distinguished Young Woman competition. She's familiar to many local musical theater fans for her many roles in high school and community theater. She is pictured here with her new-found celebrity. (Photo by Casey Blake)

EMPOWERED

Christina Maxwell — Distinguished Young Woman of America — explains her title

By Casey Blake, @AshevilleCitizenTimes.com

Having nabbed the national title last week of Distinguished Young Woman of America — the contest formerly called America's Junior Miss — recent Reynolds High graduate Christina Maxwell, 18, is beaming with her new-found celebrity.

But despite her striking classic beauty and the competition's conclusion with a rain of confetti and tearful waves, Maxwell is anything but a tiara-wearing cliché.

Indeed, there's no hira and no sash — just a dignified, Olympic-size medallion on a ribbon. And the only time Maxwell is likely to turn off her signature smile is when the Distinguished Young Woman program is mistakenly referred to as a pageant.

"I wouldn't say it offends me when people call it a pageant, because that's a common misconception, but it just so isn't that," she said. For one thing, she noted, the competition has no swimsuit portion.

"It's not a beauty pageant — I just can't possibly say that enough," she said. "It's about

CHRISTINA MAXWELL

Age: 18
Home: Fairview
Occupation: Current Distinguished Young Woman of America and soon-to-be full-time student at The University of Michigan's musical theater program.
Education: Reynolds High School class of 2012.
Family: Mother and father, Renee and Ken Maxwell, and brother, Cal Maxwell, 15.

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Injured longboarder is on the mend and a mission

When I write about those who suffer life-threatening injuries, I like to follow up with the people to see how they are doing.

Jeffrey Beckinger, 17 and a student at Owen High, was mistakenly killed in a longboarding accident May 17 after veering into a bad patch of road and hitting the pavement without a helmet.

Nice of his crew of friends, four boys who call themselves the "Thrash Brothers," was wearing helmets. Jeffrey suffered a traumatic brain injury, and doctors told Thrash Byers, his mother, he might not survive. And if he did

live, they said he was looking at one to three years in rehab, learning everything from the basics such as feeding and dressing himself.



Jeffrey Beckinger, 17, was nearly killed in a longboarding accident in May and has now organized a concert to promote helmet use, since he's often that.

One of the most rewarding aspects of following up on people is discovering the remarkable progress some will make. Jeffrey is one of those who

IF YOU GO

What: "Thrash Brothers Jam," a benefit for the family of Jeffrey Beckinger, survivor of a longboarding accident.

When: 7 p.m. July 25, White Horse Black Mountain

Who: Performers include Aaron LaFolce, Travers Brothers Band and Chavis, all donated their talents.

More: There will also be a raffle and silent auction, but the primary purpose of the event, aside from raising money for the family, is to educate the public about helmet safety.

How much: \$15, \$10 for those with helmets.

Why: Jeffrey's accident could have been prevented if he had worn a helmet.

Jeffrey is one of those who

could have died, might have spent years in rehab, but is now home and doing well. All things considered, "It's doing pretty good," said

Thrash, who with her husband, Will, owns Byers Pettery Studio. Jeffrey was discharged June 12, after three weeks at Mission Hospital, most of it spent in the neuro-trauma unit.

"Surprisingly, he's cognitively in there," Thrash said. "His personality is back, but he's hyper-sensitive to sound and smell, and even his taste was affected somehow from the brain injury."

While a portion of his skull was removed to prevent further swelling of his brain, Jeffrey must wear a helmet most of the time, until the surgery is available to replace the right side of his skull with synthetic bone.

"He's still really tired and fairly weak," Thrash said. Besides

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MAXWELL: Bright future

Continued from Page D1

something of so much more substance than that. It's about smart, amusing young women, who they really are one thing they're doing to make their communities better.

It's not about parading skin-deep beauty. It's about women who truly make an impact.

A distinguished title
Founded in 1986 in Mobile, Ala., Distinguished Young Women describes itself as the largest and oldest national scholarship program for high school girls. During its 55 years of operation, the program has included more than 70,000 young women.

Each participant includes Dana Sawyer, Debra Manning, Katie Lee, Gillford and Kim Bostner.

It is only the second representative from North Carolina to win at the national stage. She took the state title over 18 other contestants at a ceremony in Greensboro in February.

In that contest, she was a preliminary winner in five of the five judging categories: self-expression, talent, leadership, service and scholarship. The only category she did not win was community service.

She came in first in self-expression and talent in the finals in Mobile, where she heard 19 other contestants for the national title. For the Distinguished Young Women category of the same name, Judges later told her that there may not be another one as her age in the country who could have hit the high K in the piece.

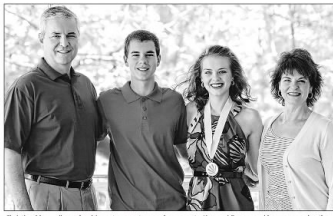
I never, ever thought I would win this far," Maxwell said. "I'm not one of those winners where you're rooting as you get beyond the state yet still imagine it's coming true."

With 100,000 a year and more than 54,000 in scholarship money from the local, state and national competitions.

In her role as Distinguished Young Woman, she will travel the country to represent the organization. She is planning for a national media tour sometime this summer.

It's a great opportunity to dream where winning the Distinguished Young Women competition and going to University of Michigan, and they both come as her age," she said. "It's incredibly humbling, and I am just so blessed."

Maxwell's lifelong list of achievements and talents are as impressive as they are diverse.



Christina Maxwell says her biggest supporters are her parents, Ken and Renee, and her younger brother, Ken, a current Reynolds High School student. From left: Ken Maxwell, Christina Maxwell, Renee Maxwell, Ken Maxwell.



Maxwell at the Distinguished Young Woman national finals in Mobile, immediately after having been named the winner. Photo by the author.



Maxwell at the Distinguished Young Woman national finals in Mobile, immediately after having been named the winner. Photo by the author.

She graduated in June with a 4.0 grade point average — tied in her class at Reynolds — and beat out 700 other students to make one of the 23 spots in the University of Michigan's national theater program.

She was a member of National Honor Society and student council and has had a long list of volunteer jobs, including with the Special Olympics. She was the headline talent and one of the organizers for a major fundraiser for Habitat in April.

In Reynolds, she played the lead role of Maria in "West Side Story" as her freshman year —

went crazy," her dad, Ken Maxwell said, remembering the "West Side Story" production.

She traveled with the school's cheerleaders and was an embryo program in Bowling in 2009 — an experience she said "changed everything about the way I interact with the world."

"To sing and to play were the real reasons we were there, to share the life-changing gift of music with people on the other side of the world," she said.

"It's so nice to sing or play in the United States where people are used to what is coming out of our mouths and instruments," Maxwell said, "and it's quite a thrill to make music in a country where the audience is hanging on every single note and clapping their hands with joy when they hear something they recognize."

Family ... and flashing?
Maxwell said her heroes range from Sunday Day's "Country and Mother" Teresa to Tim Tebow, but her faith, family and community inspire her most.

"I have been blessed with the amazing support system of people who truly believe in me, and I don't get that credit too often," she said.

Maxwell comes home to a somewhat full set of programs, she says and the stage outside her home means testing her voice, as well as her delivery every time she has a public speaking opportunity that she has to give.

"I'm not sure when I just offhandedly mentioned that she couldn't have imagined in an earlier drama that she'd be coming home to this," said her mom, Renee Maxwell, who also competed in the program almost 30 years ago.

"When we heard there was the 'North Carolina,' we just

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VISUAL ARTS CALENDAR

Local area art events include the opening and closing show of exhibitions and events from July 10-15. For more information, call 252-328-2000.

LARGE YOUNG ARTISTS
Open to ages 13-18. For more information, call 252-328-2000.

ADULT ARTISTS
Open to ages 19 and over. For more information, call 252-328-2000.

WEEKLY WATERCOLOR
Open to ages 13-18. For more information, call 252-328-2000.

ARTS CLASSES
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weekly. Details for artists 8 Aug. For prospectus, visit www.ashevilleartscalendar.com.

"FREE FRIDAYS" 10:30-11:30 a.m. Aug. 3. No-fee, no-fee. Book store. Details for artists 8 Aug.

HOME-SCHOOL PROGRAM For grades 1-6. Tues. 10:30 a.m. Details for artists 8 Aug.

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Proficiency of early childhood education, and education. It's a wonderful introduction to our new members and teachers. Parents are welcome to attend with their child. Classes are in Winston-Salem on Wednesday, starting Wednesday, July 11. Details for artists 8 Aug.

"Reflection" is among the works by Rebecca King King will be present for a reception July 28 at the gallery. Visit www.crownofthetree.com.

EXPERIMENTAL ART WORK Open to ages 13-18. For more information, call 252-328-2000.

WEEKLY WATERCOLOR Open to ages 13-18. For more information, call 252-328-2000.

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"COME PLAY WITH CLAY" with clay instructor Bill Wynn. Tues. 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. July 17 & 18. Sun. 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. July 19 & 20. Sun. 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. July 21 & 22. For more information, call 252-328-2000.

WOOD FIRE CERAMICS Open to ages 13-18. For more information, call 252-328-2000.

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