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February 15, 2012

Jolley hopes crown will help her combat “psychology of failure” in children

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.— Gardner-Webb University recently held its annual Miss Gardner-Webb pageant, awarding the crown to senior public relations major and former Miss Lincoln County Apple Queen 2008, Sara Jolley, of Lincolnton, N.C. Jolley was one of 20 applicants and 12 contestants to compete for the Miss Gardner-Webb 2012 title.

Jolley’s poise and grace impressed the judges during the pageant’s fashion and interview portions, but it was her performance in the talent and platform portions that made her stand out. “I love to watch pageants,” she said, “but it almost seems like there is a set genre of talents for pageants: vocal, dance, and instrument performance. What I love about the Miss Gardner-Webb pageant is that girls tend to put other talents on display that break that pageant mold.”

For her talent, Jolley wrote and performed an original monologue about an on-campus friend whose mother passed away last April. “I was able to be with her during that process, and for an 18-year-old to handle such a tragedy with such grace, and to never waver in her faith—that story deserved to be told,” Jolley said.

She also chose a platform that she hopes the Miss Gardner-Webb crown will help her to combat in local schools and children’s organizations. “Some children, whether it is because of poor socioeconomic conditions, a bad family situation, or some other circumstance, suffer from a defeatist attitude that swallows them up before they even try things,” Jolley explained. “You wouldn’t think second-graders would suffer from poor self-esteem, but I see it all the time.”

Jolley, whose mother is a teacher, has spent months tutoring at-risk children in the early elementary grades. Borrowing a phrase used by Charlotte, N.C., Mayor Anthony Foxx, Jolley diagnosed their mindset as “the psychology of failure,” and expressed her plan to overcome such a self-perpetuating cycle.

“It’s amazing how powerful encouragement and affirmation can be. These kids need to hear that they are worth something, that someone believes in them,” she said. Jolley also suggests teaching children to set short-term and long-term goals. Even adults need the motivation, the quick affirmation, and the deep satisfaction that accomplishing those goals provides, she said. The same benefits hold true for children.

“I would certainly love to visit the local elementary schools and children’s homes, and read to the kids and tell them that they are worth something. You can be that type of role model without a crown, but a crown like this can certainly open doors,” Jolley said.

Joining Jolley on the winner’s platform was First Runner Up Amber Gold, a freshman music education major from Boiling Springs, N.C. Senior Verhonda Crawford, of Chesnee, S.C., was named Second Runner Up and won “Most Talented” for her dramatic monologue. Breanna Davenport, a senior athletic training and sports management major from Glade Spring, Va., won “Miss Photogenic.” Hannah Hellyer, a junior international business major from Stirling, Ontario, was voted “Miss Congeniality” by her fellow contestants.