

The Behrend Beacon

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From crowns to text books



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Soni, on location shooting another segment for her television show that airs on Dish Network.

by Courtney Straub
news editor

On the surface, Deepti Soni looks like an average, 18 year-old, college freshmen. She goes to class, lives in Niagara Hall, and enjoys shopping.

Despite her normalcy, Soni is very unique in the fact that she was Miss Teen India Georgia in 2001.

Soni won the Miss Teen India Georgia competition in August 2001.

"My mom and dad and their friends persuaded me to go into the competition," said Soni. "Plus I want to give everything in life a try at least once".

She beat out over 30 participants. The competition was held at The Gwinnett Performing Arts Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

To try and win the title, participants had to compete in four categories which included a talent, question and answer, evening wear and Indian wear.

"My talent was Indian dancing. I have done my arangatrum(graduated from Indian Dance Academy). I have been dancing ever since I was five" said Soni.

For the question and answer portion of the competition, Soni was asked which values her family has given her that she would like to pass on to her family.

Soni's answer was "My family always sticks together through good times and bad and I want to always remember that value".

Soni also thinks it is very important for younger members of the family to respect their elders.

After each round contestants were eliminated. Soni lasted through all four grueling rounds to win the crown.

The competition was very beneficial in helping Soni shape herself as a young adult.

"I gained self-confidence and learned that I can achieve anything as long as I

put my mind, body and soul to it," said Soni.

Soni also met many new people during the competition and made new friends.

Some of Soni's winnings included concert tickets, Indian outfits, jewelry and make-up gift certificates.

After winning Miss Teen India Georgia, Soni received many invitations to speak at local events.

Next, Soni was offered a job hosting a TV show entitled Community Round-Up. The show is aired all over the United States twice a week on Dish Network.

The show was not given to Soni because she won the competition.

"They just saw me speaking and liked the way I was presenting myself," said Soni.

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Merrill 'lights' up Junker Center

by Lauren Packer
editor in chief

Steve Merrill, BLASC 09, lights up the Junker Center once again. A former standout basketball player for the Lions, Merrill no longer rocks the Junker with a fade-away at the buzzer or a trey atop the key.

Merrill now heads up "Friday Night... Lights On." Never heard about it? That's because Merrill has taken on the task of organizing and publicizing the event on his own. But, the idea for the event wasn't even Merrill's.

Call it divine intervention. Call it heavenly. The inspiration for the event sponsored by Catholic Campus Ministry and Protestant Campus Ministry started from a single vision.

"I guess you could say it's kind of odd

how it started," said Merrill. "I work with FCA (Fellowship of Christian Athletes) and we had a Bible study one night. After the study, it was actually like a vision. That's where it (Friday Night...Lights On) really birthed."

The event happens not quite every Friday night from 9-11 p.m. The entire Junker Center is open later to allow students to participate in board games, basketball, soccer, volleyball, swimming, water basketball, etc. CCM and PCM also provide free food to feed late night appetites.

"With basketball, I hadn't really been able to do anything on a Friday night," said Merrill. "But I didn't really hear of anything to do later in the night either."

Merrill, a nondrinker, heard that a lot of people go to parties simply to get together and hang out.

"I've seen the effects of alcohol and I don't want people to go down that path. Maybe, by just this event, we can get people together with others who don't like to drink so they don't go down that path."

Now, thanks to the divine intervention and Merrill's willingness to coordinate such an event, students have the opportunity to get together with fellow peers on late night Friday night without the alcohol.

When asked how his program fit into the range of Behrend programs, Merrill humbly stated that he doesn't like to put his program up against the others on campus.

"If somebody wants to do something, there is plenty to do," said Merrill. "I just try to open up the athletic side of it. I try to tie in with it board games and

things that people who aren't athletic can do."

The event has already been held three times this semester and looks like its gaining popularity. The first time it was held, Merrill estimated that 30-40 people attended. The second time, however, Merrill didn't have a chance to advertise for the event as much as the first time and attendance dipped. The third time was a charm, however, and attendance spiked upward well into the twenties.

Taking 17 credits worth of classes, Merrill plans to go on to become a chiropractor after his studies at Behrend are over in the spring of 2004. Merrill admits that organizing such an event, plus having a full plate of schoolwork has taken its toll on the event.

"My dreams originally were pretty big. When I first thought about organizing the

event, I wanted to go all out. I wanted to get those inflatable games, like sumo wrestling and jousting," said Merrill.

Ever so modest, Merrill realizes that he can only do so much and rejoices in the fact that God has given him so many students with which to enjoy "Friday Night...Lights On."

"I really had to cut back on a lot of my original plans, but I'm happy," said Merrill. "I'm thankful the Lord gave me 40 people to join me."

Merrill is hopeful more people can join the Friday night fun. The more people helping, the better.

"I'm trying to finish up my credits and organize this great event. As far as having the event next semester, I'm kind of praying about that right now," said Merrill.

Senior standout student athlete Kis receives citizenship

by Syreeta Anderson
staff writer

When filling out important forms, U.S. citizens always check the box that says legal residents. What if living here was not that easy? What if you had to find somewhere you could call your permanent address, live here for a certain amount of years, and then take a test to be called a U.S. citizen?

Dario Kis, PLET 09, knows exactly what that experience feels like. Kis, originally from Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, established a permanent residence in U.S. in 1995 when his family left Bosnia because of the war. After leaving Bosnia his family had to worry about paperwork and legal issues with staying in different countries.

"My parents and I have moved here and started a new life, getting our citizenship as something that

kind of made it official," said Kis.

Kis received his citizenship in February 2003. He was able to get his citizenship right here in Erie through the International Institute. By law, you have to stay for at least 5 years before you can apply for the citizenship.

"(Living in America for five years is) why I had to wait that long to get my citizenship," said Kis.

The process of getting his citizenship happened over a large period of time.

After establishing a permanent residence in 1995, Dario and his family waited six years to apply for their citizenship. In 2002, the application was finally processed. During that year, they had to go on several interviews. Finally, earlier this year the process was ending, he and his family had to take a test about the English language, history and

government.

Kis said, "The test was verbal and fairly brief." After the test was over and all the paper work had been processed and approved; there was a ceremony in Erie's courthouse to announce their new citizenship.

"It's nice to finally put everything behind us," Kis said.

"I came to Behrend because of the excellent plastics engineering program," said Kis.

Kis dedicates just about all of his time to studying and sports. He keeps a busy schedule. While he's not sure how many hours a week he spends studying, but he is usually at school from 7 a.m. into the late evening hours. He's often working hard studying or working on his senior project.

"I try to do things far in advance, plan when to do my work, and most importantly get it done when

I plan to," said Kis about managing his time.

Kis is an active member of the Behrend water sports. He was on the varsity swim team for the last three years and currently he is in his fourth year and the captain of the varsity Water Polo team.

"Doing water polo and swimming is something I really enjoy," Kis said.

It is hard managing schoolwork, sports and a social life, but Kis seems to have the hang of it. After doing sports for four years, he has come to realize that, "your teammates become your closest friends whether you like it or not ... spending time with them outside of practice and at games is something I have gotten use too."

In spite of it all Kis has a very optimistic view, "it feels good to finally belong somewhere," he said.