

Dairy princesses gather for annual seminar

BY MARGIE FUSCO
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WILLIAMSPORT — With apologies to the Brothers Grimm: Princesses are made, not born.

Pennsylvania Dairy Princess Lynette Loper can attest to that. "One year ago I sat in this room, too. And I was just like you are now," she told the audience of nervous county dairy princesses and their alternates. Then she went on to explain what the annual Dairy Princess Training Seminar did for her. "I learned how to walk. I learned how to talk."

She clearly learned well. Scanning the 60 hopeful faces in the auditorium now, you can't help but wonder which one will be her successor. Were this a standard beauty pageant, you might be able to speculate about the blonde in the third row or the brunette in the back. But being a dairy princess isn't as simple as parading around in a bathing suit.

"If you want to learn about responsibility, try being a dairy princess," a friend recently confided to this reporter. "It's not glamour. It's hard work." Tina Shultz knows that. She cuts short her dinner to go back to her room and work on her presentation. Wanda Love, her alternate, knows it, too. She comes along, getting ready for the day when she may have to replace Tina for one of the

visits the princess and her alternates have to make to third-grade classrooms throughout Huntingdon County.

"We don't emphasize beauty here," says Jan Harding, who coordinated this year's seminar at Lycoming College in Williamsport for Pennsylvania Dairy Promotion Services, Inc. "These girls have a job to do."

But if beauty isn't the main focus, it's clearly evident. As the first guest speaker. Scott Higgins of Federal Order #36, takes the podium and mentions the beautiful looking crowd, the girls shift nervously in their seats. They're self-conscious, unaware of the fresh and healthy image they project together.

The job comes first. About half of the three-day seminar is devoted to teaching the princesses and their court about the dairy industry. The first day features a two-hour capsule on the dairy promotions that will be occurring over the next year.

The candidates are treated to a showing of television advertisements that will run on the local and national level. They giggle at rock-and-roll parodies that will promote milk to radio listeners. They view the point-of-purchase displays that will appear in stores they'll be visiting during their year's reign.

In addition, they meet the industry promotion people who will help them arrange for materials.

The first day's program also includes an explanation of the federal orders, their locations, their market areas, and their intended plans for using the 15 cent per hundred weight promotional contribution state dairy farmers are providing. As speaker Trish Williams of the Mid-Atlantic Milk Marketing Association explains, the donations that are coming from their own families' farms will, in large part, stay locally and help the state's princesses do their job of promoting the dairy industry on a grassroots level.

To augment that purpose, the princesses later attend sessions on how to deal effectively with the print and broadcast media, as well as a lecture on "What to Know about Cows" provided by Ken Ramey of the state Holstein Association.

It's not only the princesses who must study. Their supporting committee members and parents learn about bookings, how to plan school and public promotions, how to fund the ventures, and how to help the princess have an effective year.

It's an awesome task: to take a room full of awkward teenagers and, in three days, turn them into spokespersons for the industry. If the odds against success seem overwhelming, one has only to look at Lynette Loper to see that poise and grace are endowments. There is no fairy godmother available, no magic dust to scatter over the group and transform them. But just as surely as there is no available witchcraft, a different kind of magic is taking place.

When they registered, they were 60 individuals, quiet and shy. As they troop into the first seminar, they hug close to the few people they know, the alternates, mothers, and committee members. At dinner, they sit in clusters, most often by county. But after three hours of lectures, they're more willing to talk.

By the time the first evening's seminar is about to begin, the magic is working. There's someone from Clearfield County asking about someone she knows who lives in Adams County. As the grownups begin to mingle, too, the girls take their seats. Instead of clusters of two and three, there are rows of eight and ten now.

A zany talk about hair care helps even more to break the ice. The girls can't help laughing along with the speaker as she describes the way cowlicks insist on sticking out on your head and the "wild raspberry" tint she's added to her hair.

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Theresa Tkaczuk, Chester County dairy princess, is the model as Melinda Johnson experiments with cloth swatches to find her best colors.



Princesses, alternates and advisors listen to a talk on dairy product marketing during the dairy princess seminar at Lycoming College this week.

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