

Navajo Beauty Queen Hopes To Send Message Of Respect

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FARMINGTON, N.M. (AP) - Mariah Kay Bolding isn't your typical beauty queen.

"When a boy opens the door, I want him to go in first," said Bolding, the new Miss Indian Farmington.

The 16-year-old pageant veteran has a similarly strong message for other American Indian teens in Farmington: Be yourself. Respect your culture. Don't let your mistakes hold you back.

Bolding grew up in Shiprock and Farmington.

"In Shiprock, younger people are more involved in tradition," she said. "Being out here, kids my age and younger are ashamed of being Native American. They don't participate in events ... they make fun of things, kind of teasing."

That's at least in part, she said, because young people encounter prejudice, and she isn't immune.

After she moved to Farmington permanently in the seventh grade, for a time she rejected the Navajo traditions her aunt taught her.

"I'm trying to learn about myself again, get back everything I threw away," she said.

She wants other teens to know that youthful mistakes are reversible. "Everyone can change," she said.

Bolding won her first title, Miss Head Start, in 1996, and then took Miss Atsa Biyaazh Community School in 2002. In 2003, she won the Miss Northwest High School pageant in Shiprock. She was picked for the Farmington title out of six girls.

Bolding was the only candidate who went out into the crowd and shook strangers' hands during the June 15 program's intermission, Farmington Indian Center Community Coordinator Myra Newman said. And the three judges - Farmington Intertribal Indian Center Board member RoseAnne Bahe-Toledo, Shiprock Navajo Nation Council Delegate Leonard Anthony and KNDN radio personality Donna Benally - were watching.

So was her family.

"We're very proud," said her mother, Linda Nolan, 48, of Shiprock. "She did get a lot of support from her family, sisters, brother. Her Nana is really proud."

For the traditional talent segment, Bolding sung Navajo songs her aunt taught her. For her modern talent she showed off fashion designs, contrasting trends with classic looks.

"I was really worried about it before the pageant," Nolan said. She asked her daughter if she needed any help preparing. "She said, 'Mom, don't worry about it. I have it under control.'"

Looking forward, the incoming high school junior either wants to enter the military, then either join the FBI or the CIA, or become a fashion designer.

"I want to make something of myself," she said. "I want to show people that if you work hard, you'll get it."

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