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Junior Miss comes home with kudos

By CATHERINE BAUM
Staff Writer

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Monday, February 23, 2009

FRANKLIN - Greater Easthampton Junior Miss Marissa Dombkowski was brought to tears Saturday when she received the Dennis Duffin Spirit Award at the Massachusetts Junior Miss competition.

The award, given to a Junior Miss who demonstrates exceptional attitude in the rehearsal week before the state competition, is the only honor in which Junior Miss contestants select its recipient.

"It means so, so much to me," said Dombkowski, who was wearing a green evening gown. "It means the world."

Franklin Junior Miss Alina Ostrow, who played the piano for her talent piece, was granted the state Junior Miss title. She will represent Massachusetts in the America Junior Miss competition in Mobile, Ala.

Family and friends congratulated Dombkowski in the Horace Mann Middle School auditorium, where judges evaluated her Friday and Saturday evening in interview ability, talent, fitness and self-expression. A team from the Bentley University Admissions Office reviewed her scholastic achievements.

The Hampshire Regional High School senior left the competition with spirit and fitness awards totaling \$500, not to mention priceless relationships.

"When I came here I said to myself if I walk away with one, solid friendship, then this was a success," Dombkowski said with tears in her green eyes and a beaming smile on her face. "I can honestly say I made 13 of them. I never thought I could make friends like that in just one week."

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CATHERINE BAUM

Marissa Dombkowski holds her fitness and spirit awards at the Massachusetts Junior Miss competition Saturday as Greater Easthampton Junior Miss director Jennifer Lawton looks on.



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The 18-year-old Southamptton woman was showered with affection from Hampshire County and northern Vermont relatives, friends and organizers from the Greater Easthampton Junior Miss program, and her brother Drew, who shared a moment with her via phone.

"The most important thing is the friendships and the real support she's received from the Greater Easthampton program," said Holly Dombkowski, Marissa's mother, who sat in the crowd with her daughter's supporters. The Easthampton crew wore glow sticks and waved signs with Dombkowski's photo created by Greater Easthampton Junior Miss director Jennifer Lawton.

"They have been so fabulous," Holly Dombkowski said.

Marissa saw her glow-in-the-dark fans as she performed her tap dance talent piece to "Ease on Down the Road."

"It made me laugh," she said, which seemed to have a ripple effect, as supporters say her enthusiasm and positive attitude contributed to her successes.

"She has a natural presence on stage - she's always smiling," said Easthampton High School Principal Jeffrey Sealander, who is Dombkowski's godfather. Sealander was also there to support 2008 Massachusetts Junior Miss and Easthampton High School alumnus Samantha Lyman, who performed a lyrical dance and gave a farewell speech Saturday night.

"Having Sam here is an added bonus," Sealander said.

The week leading up to the state competition kept Dombkowski busy. She stayed with a host family, engaged in community service projects and rehearsed her talent piece, which was different from the one she performed in the local competition in November.

A trip to the Statehouse didn't work out as planned when the car Dombkowski was in broke down, leaving four Junior Misses in medallions waiting for help.

"While the girls were at the Statehouse having fun, we were on the side of the highway taking pictures," Dombkowski said laughing. "So that's pretty memorable."

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