

Published November 23rd, 2011

Miss Moraga Valley takes on the Universe

By Sophie Braccini



Mary Beth Ward on the Saint Mary's campus Photo
Sophie Braccini

A cute, slender blond with baby blue eyes and a lot of self-confidence, Mary Beth Ward, a Moraga-raised Saint Mary's College (SMC) student, decided she wants to represent Moraga in the Miss Universe beauty pageant, a joint venture of Donald J. Trump and NBC Universal. She says her motivation is helping younger girls discover their inner beauty.

"I was watching e-news on Channel 24 and saw an ad for Miss Universe," recalls the SMC freshman, "they said that anyone could apply. I had never been in a pageant, but found the idea interesting. I looked it up and liked the emphasis on community service: they wanted young women who give back and they claim they are evaluating the girls on their achievements. So I decided to apply."

Ward had to pick a name for herself to enter the first stage, which is the Miss California competition. She asked her childhood neighbor, Moraga Mayor Karen Mendonca, what she thought about using the name Miss Moraga Valley. "The young women can enter this contest with any name they want," said Mendonca, "Mary Beth wanted a name that would represent where she comes from, but not compromise any town or jurisdiction because we never had

a contest. 'Miss Moraga Valley' is a good idea."

The first title to win on the way to Miss Universe is Miss California. 150 young women, who were selected by the Miss Universe organization from among those who applied, will compete for that title on January 8th. Ward said that she went through a series of phone and personal interviews to be selected. She believes that her volunteerism in Moraga, as a Girl Scout, a member of the Moraga Youth Involvement Committee, and in her church, played a key role.

"I want to take this opportunity to make a difference in my community," says Ward. "When I was in fourth grade I was chubby and too tall, other kids would tease me. Girls between 4th and 7th grade have body image issues and try to fit it. It's a very hard time, with a lot of clique-ish behaviors and pressures." Her objective is to create or support events and workshops that will empower young women.

The New Rheem Theatre will provide her with her first chance. "We are planning a movie day/workshop combination," she says, "we'll have a movie at 11:00 a.m. on a Saturday, such as Miss Congeniality, followed by a discussion with a motivational speaker and activities for the girls." Ward herself gets trained by the Miss Universe organization, with podcasts and videos on female empowerment, fitness, and motivation.

At the end of November, Ward will go to Florida for an orientation session. Then she will have to get ready for the California competition in Palm Springs. "I know that some of the girls have pageant coaches, but I do not," says Ward, "the girls in my Hall are prepping me, and they interview me or make me walk in heels- it's like getting ready for Senior Ball!" Ward thinks that she has a good chance to win. "I am really hopeful," she says.

Ward has a Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Mary-Beth-Ward-for-Miss-California-USA/273561789351501>, where interested Moraga residents can 'like' her project. "Whatever happens, I will continue the community service for girls," she concludes.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA