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Pageants take NKU senior across the globe

Criminal justice major loves the spotlight, friends

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

Ashlei Sothard, 21, a senior criminal justice major at Northern Kentucky University, will represent the United States in the 36th annual Miss Intercontinental Beauty Pageant in the Republic of Seychelles, an island nation in the Indian Ocean 900 miles off the African coast.

Sothard of Newport will compete against women from 44 other countries for the title. The pageant, scheduled for Oct. 13, is broadcast in 17 countries but not the U.S.

Pageant competition is something that Sothard has enjoyed since she entered her first one at 17.

"The fun part is the actual competition," said Sothard. "After finding the right dress and swimsuit and going to interview coaching and all the makeup and hair, you get to walk out on stage with all eyes on you and feel all the energy from the audience ... it's a rush."

The best part of the competition, Sothard said, is the camaraderie with other contestants.

"I love making friends with the girls at pageants," she said. "There are girls all over the country that I talk with on a regular basis and I love that. It's always great to get to a pageant and have your friends there to hang out with."

Friendship helped make a pageant she lost - the Miss Kentucky Hawaiian Tropic finals - her most joyous.

"It came down to me and my best friend, Michelle Banzer, who is the current Miss Kentucky USA," she said. "We were the only two left standing and we hugged each other so tight waiting for the final announcement. It was great because we knew we would be happy either way the pageant went. She won, but I got the Miss Fitness award and the Best Smile award."

Sothard won the following year. "It was cool to be Michelle's successor."

Sothard is well-traveled as a result of her pageants. Last Monday she flew back to Cincinnati from Hawaii where she competed in the Miss Hawaiian Tropic International Model Search U.S. Finals, then flew out later that night for the Seychelles.

She graduates in December.

"I'm in the honors program and in the National Criminal Justice Honors Society, Alpha Phi Sigma," she said. "I want to become a special agent for the FBI so hopefully my acting experience will allow me to do a lot of undercover work. I guess I will be able to incorporate what I'm doing now with my career."

ON THE WEB

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