Miss Congeniality 3: HIV

HIV beauty queens past and present who rule aids activism

October 1, 2005 By Diana Scholl

Chirping for world peace just won't win a girl the crown anymore. Since Leanza Cornett was dubbed Miss America 1993 with the first-ever AIDS platform (education and prevention), some valiant pageant vixens have dolled up the virus into their cause du jour. With Uganda launching Africa's second pageant for positive ladies this month, POZ marked the milestone by catching up with five of our favorite sash wearers to take the pulse of their activism.

Name Leanza Cornett
Title Miss America 1993
Mission The former Miss Florida testified before Congress and helped get AIDS education into classrooms. "A lot of activism was associated with outrageous antics, but I was invited to speak at rotary clubs and grade schools."
Now Cornett will be attending a Florida AIDS fundraiser this month—and hosting dog shows on the Animal Planet channel.

Name Kate Shindle
Title Miss America 1998
Mission Miss Illinois advocated for needle exchange, taking her tiara to the 1998 World AIDS confab. "I didn't have anything to lose," she says of her battle to teach harm reduction. "Miss America can't be voted out of office."
Now A Broadway actress, Shindle recently spoke up in home state New Jersey for much-needed needle exchanges.

Name Natalie Glebova
Title Miss Universe 2005
Mission Glebova admits she was an AIDS novice before winning (the Trump-owned org assigns AIDS platforms). Now the Canadian is passionate, even taking a public HIV test in South Africa. "This might even be my career."
Now After speaking at a November AIDS confab in Brazil, Glebova plans to open Russia's eyes to HIV.

Name Cynthia Leshomo
Title Miss HIV Stigma-Free Botswana 2005

Mission HIVer Leshomo beat out 11 other HIV positive beauties in February, showing that HIV isn't always the pits. "Some people are very ignorant—they complain that the pageant encourages people to get infected."
Now Leshomo has hosted HIV powwows for school children and met with the president. She plans to educate "until the day I die."

Name Tara Burns
Title Miss Tennessee 2005
Mission A volunteer with a Nashville ASO, Burns is this year's only Miss America contestant with an AIDS platform. "After doing community service, I was hit [with the fact] that HIV awareness is not where it should be in America."
Now Burns is cochairing Nashville's AIDS Walk and prepping to outclass 50 other Miss America wannabes in January 2006.

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