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Civil engineering student to compete in Miss Michigan pageant

Last month **Allison Porrett**, a third-year civil engineering student with a 3.6 GPA, won the 2007 Miss Kalamazoo County title, which means she will represent this area in next June's Miss Michigan pageant. "If I win at the state level, then I go on to compete for Miss America," she said.

Porrett is not a veteran pageant competitor. The county event was only the second time she has ever competed. Her first was last July, when, without any training in pageant competition, she entered the Miss Blue Lakes' contest in Port Huron to "see what was expected and to learn how to walk," she said.

The Kalamazoo competition had four components: an interview on a variety of issues such as her reasons for competing, her platform, and her opinions on current issues; evening gown; swim suit; and talent.

For her talent component, the 2005 graduate of Port Huron Northern High School dressed in a Roaring 20's flapper costume and sang the Broadway version of "All That Jazz," from the musical *Chicago*.

Each pageant competitor was required to present a platform issue that she feels strongly about. Porrett's is "empowering girls to become engineers," she said.

According to Porrett, young girls in elementary school should be encouraged to take their studies seriously. "The culture doesn't encourage girls to get excited about engineering, but when I'm one of only three women in an engineering class, I want to help girls bridge the gap and bring more balance to engineering," she said.



At a Society of Women workshop, **Allison Porrett** instructs Girl Scouts in the preparation of Alka-Seltzer-propelled rockets that were launched in front of the WMU Parkview Campus. Her pageant platform is "empowering girls to become engineers."

As a member of WMU's Society of Women engineers (SWE), Porrett, a former Girl Scout who was active from early elementary school through middle school, now participates in SWE Girl Scout workshops.

Porrett knew she wanted to be an engineer when she came to WMU. "I always did well in math and science, so I was told I should go into engineering," she said.

Choosing civil engineering came at the end of her first year, but she had already been "leaning towards civil" because of a job shadowing experience in an architectural firm. While job shadowing the architect, she met a civil engineer whose job seemed more interesting.

Allison Porrett - comfortable in both hats ...



Miss Kalamazoo County crown



civil engineering hard hat

"Architects come up with ideas for structures, but civil engineers make sure those structures don't fall down," she said. "By the end of my freshman year, I was 100-percent sure I wanted to be a civil engineer."

Although she does not presently favor any specific civil engineering projects, she knows where she would eventually like to work. "I've always liked Chicago; it's a big city but it's not terribly far away from my family," she said. "I also know I want to earn a PE (professional engineering certification) and to eventually earn a master's degree."

Winning the title added scholarship funds to Porrett's already impressive list of awards. Presently the secretary of SWE, Porrett recently left the WMU marching band to join the WMU chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), where she plans to assist in next year's concrete canoe competition.

As Miss Kalamazoo County, Porrett will be on-call to attend ceremonies, parades, and other events or to participate in activities such as speaking, singing, or mentoring. "Anytime there's an event, I get a call and I show up," she said.

A Port Huron resident, Porrett qualified for the local competition based on her being a full-time WMU student. She is excited about being Miss Kalamazoo County and about competing in next June's state event. "I have a lot of work ahead of me to prepare for the Miss Michigan contest," she said.

Send your thoughts on this article or your suggestions for future articles to the editor at jerrie.fiala@wmich.edu Thank you.