

Tiny Tot Pageant and Best Dressed Grandma and Grandpa Competition

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
Thursday, 10 August 2017 23:58



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Talent comes in all ages

A new edition to this year's 96th Annual Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial was the 'Tiny Tot Pageant and Best Dressed Grandma and Grandpa' Competition. The event was held at the El Morro Theatre Aug. 7, to an almost packed house of eager onlookers.

The Tiny Tot Pageant featured total of eight contestants from the surrounding area: Kelana Nizhoni Charley/Crownpoint - 5 years old; Preaura A. Harrison/Houck, Ariz. - 5 years old; Markell Boy Mariano/Gallup - 5 years old; Kyla Taylor Bitsie/Tohatchi - 6 years old; Starlaya S. Harrison/Houck, Ariz. - 5 years old; Adalyn Lily Yonnie/Ganado, Ariz. - 6 years old; Nevaeh Angel Tsipai/Newcomb - 5 years old; Bryson James Benallie/Ft. Defiance, Ariz. - 6 years old.

Each tot introduced themselves, modeled their traditional attire, and performed a talent.

Little Brave 1st place winner received a huge Teddy Bear, Pendleton blanket, and sash belt. Little Princess received a teddy bear, silver turquoise crown, and sash belt. As for the other contestants, there were no losers. Each one would receive a \$10 Gift Card from McDonalds and a water bottle filled with candy.

Tot Charley introduced herself in Navajo/Dineh, and attempted to say a prayer as well in Navajo, with a stern look on her little face. The audience melted with joy at her attempt. Her talent was counting from 1 to 10, reading a story, and singing in Navajo. At the end of her talent

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performance she told the audience:

“I would show you how to butcher a sheep, but I forgot my sheep,” Charley said. “Don’t drink and drive and text.”

Contestant Mariano immediately received a huge applause as he came out to introduce himself in his Apache Crown Spirit regalia. He even drew a louder response as he danced in full regalia to an Apache Crown Dance song.

Benallie sang a traditional song in his Navajo language and kept stopping and beginning all the while saying: “Ah...I keep forgetting,” but drew sheer support from the audience.

In the Best Dressed Grandma and Grandpa competition, contestants were: Geralene Billie/Brimhall; Dorothy Bitsilly/Tohatchi; David L. Martinez aka “Bronco Martinez”/Smith Lake; and Rita Becenti Martinez/Crownpoint. Each contestant recieved a \$25 gift card from Earl’s Restaurant.

Each introduced themselves while modeling their attire as the emcee told the audience how it plays an important part in their culture.

Contestant Billie said her sash belt represented her three kids and the achievements they have made.

Grandma Bitsilly spoke of all her kids including her 23 grandchildren, 33 great-grandchildren, and one great-great grandchild.

Contestant Martinez received a big applause as he came on stage dressed in his traditional cowboy attire. Several elderly women could be heard giggling like school girls as they shouted out his name.

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Someone in the audience shouted, "That's not Martinez ... that's Bronco Martinez!"

Martinez tipped his hat to the ladies as he left the stage, which elicited more giggles.

Midway through the competition a performance by Ashe:kwe Dance group from the Pueblo of Zuni performed for the crowd with their group of five girls, and two boys. This was a well-received performance from the crowd for their singing and dancing.

With a short intermission and time for the judges to tally up the scores, conversations could be heard about how well the competition was going. One particular person who was flabbergasted at the audience turnout was Ceremonial Director Dudley Byerley, who just couldn't believe the support of the event and excitement of it all.

"I think that those of you who missed it, don't realize what you just missed. This thing is killing it, it is probably one of the greatest things I've seen in a long time," Byerley said. "It's unreal ... I'm just blown away. What can I say this is our second new event. We did the run/walk on Saturday. I blew me away with over 250 runners, now with this thing ... we don't know what we was getting into. But this thing is three-quarters filled up...so like I said for those of you who missed it ... are really missing something ... it's crazy good!"

The announcement came for the Best Dressed Grandma and Grandpa, each winner received a \$25 gift card from Earl's, a chance to be in the parade, and in the Grand Entry for the Pow Wow this Saturday.

Being the only grandpa at the competition, "Bronco Martinez," from Smith Lake took Best Dressed Grandpa. Martinez was quite happy and shared his thoughts on when he first attended the Ceremonial at the age of seven and now being 76-years-old.

"I feel great...I feel young again (laughing)! I've been coming to the ceremonial ever since I was about 7 years old. Way back we didn't come in a wagon but we've seen some wagons coming

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in. We came in an old pickup truck. Of course, we were all in the back and you know it was quite a fascinating trip for me because that was the first time I've ever been away from a sheep camp...(laughing)."

Winner of the Best Dressed Grandma was Dorothy Bitsilly who was surprised she was chosen.

"I'm so thankful and I'm so grateful, but at the same time. I'm surprised I never thought I would be the winner," Bitsilly said. "I do participate a lot...I work with people and I was 'Ms. Navajo Shima 2006-07' and I did a lot of traveling in fairs, parade, I really enjoy doing this. I really do."

Rita Becenti Martinez, who is Bronco's wife, didn't win but was overall glad to just be in the competition for fun.

"I was nervous ... I didn't know what to do, this is my very first time, and I've only been to the Ceremonial three times ... third time now because I've always been working," she said. "It's all I do...but it was fun, like Bronco says, 'it's the name of the game.'"

Now came the moment everyone was waiting for, the announcement of the 2017 Inter-tribal Ceremonial "Little Princess" and "Little Brave!"

Taking the title of "Little Brave" was 5-year-old Markell Boy Mariano. A roar of applause went up as Mariano went to go pick up his enormous teddy bear, which was bigger than him. His mother, Monique Lynn Mariano, and family members were beyond thrilled.

"It was exciting ... we were very nervous for him as we were sitting out here watching him. We knew he was going to do a good job," Mariano said. "He's been practicing all week, he's really interested in his music and dancing. His uncles dance with him as well as his dad, he kind of learned from there."

When asked how tiny tot Mariano felt, he smiled as he tried to hold onto his giant teddy bear.

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“Good ... yes, I’m 5 years old, thank you!”

Kyla Taylor Bitsie took the title of “Little Princess” and was awarded a giant teddy bear as well.

Ceremonial board member Cynthia Poblano was impressed with the turnout and participation of the community.

“I thought it was really wonderful especially jut seeing the kids as young as they are to carry on the tradition...I thought it was beautiful,” Poblano said. “I loved everybody that participated. It was great ... it was a great show! I was surprised of how many people showed for this event. I really do believe next year this will be huge, especially more of the grandma’s and grandpa’s being aware of what’s going on to be participating.”

City Councilor Fran Palochak echoed Poblano’s sentiments.

“Overall, I thought it was wonderful and the people that made it the best were these little kids...their so talented and they’re not afraid of crowds,” Palochak said.

“I think they made me calm down (laughing), they knew what they were doing. I knew it was such a tough decision for those judges, but we just thank everybody for coming out and participating, and next year it’s going to even bigger and better. I was so happy it was almost a full house even though we had only eight participants. We wanted more, but that’s okay it was enough and I was happy.”

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For the Sun***