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Miss America Bound? IWU Junior Wins Miss Heart of Illinois Crown; Will Compete for Miss Illinois Title in June

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.—An Illinois Wesleyan University junior from Peoria is the new Miss Heart of Illinois, winning a \$4,700 scholarship and taking the first of three steps toward the Miss America crown.

Bethany Von Behren, 20, a music performance major and cellist, swept the four competition categories—the interview, talent, physical fitness, and eveningwear—at the Jan. 23 Miss Heart of Illinois 2000 contest at the Bertha Frank Performing Arts Center in Morton, Ill. The contest attracted 13 participants, ages 18-24, and an audience of 450. Aimee Fuller, WHOI-TV news anchor, was the mistress of ceremonies and coordinated the event.

Von Behren will compete for the title of Miss Illinois on June 27-29 in Oakbrook Terrace, Ill. The contest will feature 24 women representing different areas of the state. If she wins that crown, the next step would be the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, N.J., in October.

"Winning all phases of the Miss Heart of Illinois competition was a thrill and a surprise," Von Behren said.

She is especially proud of her success in the talent competition, where she performed David Poppers' "Hungarian Rhapsody" on the cello.

"It is a flashy piece," Von Behren said, "and technically difficult. I was able to cut it to fit the program's time constraint."

Von Behren expects to use the \$4,700 scholarship she won—and any subsequent scholarships won at other levels of competition—to help finance her graduate education, where she will continue to study the cello.

She began her cello studies a dozen years ago. "The cello interests me," Von Behren explained, "because it sounds most like a human voice and its level of expressiveness is so great. The cello offers innumerable possibilities for musical interpretation.

"When I heard about the pageant," Von Behren added, "I didn't consider myself a 'pageant girl.' But I went to the first meeting and it was a great experience. I met wonderful people and committed to it. It was a 100 percent positive experience."

Seven judges assessed the performances of Miss Heart of Illinois contestants in the four categories. The physical fitness and eveningwear portions of the competition were valued at 15 percent each, with talent and the interview accounting for 40 percent and 30 percent, respectively.

In the interview competition, for example, Von Behren was quizzed about her platform—raising children's awareness and involvement in music—and her interest in archeology. In May, 1999, she took an IWU travel course to Israel, where she studied ancient remains at Sepphoris, Near Nazareth.

"The class was fascinating," Von Behren said. "It was an eye-opening experience in several ways. I was able to get out of American and Western culture and see how people live in Israel, for example, the dynamic between Arabs and Jews living together in one nation filled with tension. I also visited the Holy sites, which was a very spiritual experience. The archeology experience was wonderful—being able to see things from the past that are 2,000 years old."

As part of her preparation for the next stages of competition, Von Behren is working on her platform dealing with youngsters and music.

"I'm contacting local schools and high schools," she explained. "I want to have the opportunity to speak to students and administrators about promoting the arts and education in Central Illinois."

Von Behren is a 1997 graduate of Peoria's Manual High School. Her parents are Linda and Arthur Von Behren of 4915 W. Linda Curve, Peoria. Bethany's father is a teacher at Hollis Grade School in Bartonville, Ill., and her mother is a teacher's aide with Catholic Social Services in Peoria.

About Illinois Wesleyan University

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,070 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts, and a \$1.65 million baseball stadium. A \$23 million library and a \$6 million student center are under construction.

Kiplinger's Personal Finance Magazine ranks Illinois Wesleyan University 12th among the nation's 1,600 private colleges in providing a high-quality education at an affordable cost. Also sharing IWU's rank are Princeton University and Dartmouth College.

