

The nomadic year of being crowned Miss International 2017

BY EVAN WILLIAMS
ewilliams@floridaweekly.com

For Kelsey Craft, a 26-year-old who lives in Estero and is a physician assistant at Gulfstream Urology in Fort Myers and Bonita Springs, it has been the year of being crowned Miss International. Since then her life was “flipped upside down.” It was the year of visiting all 50 states and six foreign countries as a Miss International spokesperson for her chosen platform: to decrease preventable diseases, including obesity and heart disease, through healthy choices.

It was a year of ups and downs in planes and sometimes on the ground: the year her grandfather died, of getting stuck in London because of Hurricane Irma, of keeping her belongings in a storage locker in Bonita Springs and living out of a suitcase, and the year of graduating with a master’s of medical science degree from Nova Southeastern University.

The Miss International organization sets itself apart from other beauty pageants in that besides beauty, community service is emphasized, specifically the winner’s reigning year of promoting whatever message she chooses.

“It isn’t all about the glitz and glamour,” she said, “It’s about, what do you want to do with this year?”

Contestants are scored most heavily on personal interviews with judges and on fitness, evening gown, and fun fashion wear events (there’s no swimsuit competition). Miss International started 30 years ago, according to the organization’s website, and the rules include that



PAULA PRESTON / COURTESY PHOTO
Kelsey Craft is crowned Miss International 2017 on Aug. 5, 2017 in Charleston, W.Va.

a contestant must be age 19 to 30, single, without children and “of good health and moral character.” Ms. Craft also had to win the Miss Florida International statewide competition before moving on to compete for the highest crown.

The prize package is worth upward of \$10,000, she said, including a travel allowance, wardrobe and makeup sponsorships and other odds and ends such as luggage. During her travels she represented American Heart Association’s Go Red for Women, attending Heart

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Miss International at a Heart Walk in Washington D.C.

ous Miss International state contests, were gracious.

“The women I competed against, or with, they were my biggest fans this year,” she said.

“It isn’t all about the glitz and glamour. It’s about, what do you want to do with this year?”

— Kelsey Craft, Miss International

She took a day trip through six Northeastern states with Miss Vermont, attended the Southern New England Heart Walk with Miss Rhode Island, visited the 9-11 Museum with Miss New York, and stayed with Miss Hawaii for a week on the island of Oahu. Miss

Arizona introduced her to her favorite barbecue place in Phoenix, Bobby-Q.

And still, the year of her reign is not quite over. Ms. Craft was awarded the crown on August 5, 2017 in Charleston, W.Va., and will soon leave to crown next year’s pageant winner. Then it will be time to resume “the simple life” — full-time work, repaying student loans, reconnecting with friends. But for a few more weeks she’s the Miss International of healthy choices, armed with information aimed at living longer as well as better: stress relief, sleep, and a sense of purpose are among the Blue Zone Project’s Power 9 fundamentals. And, heart disease is the leading cause of death among women, but some 80 percent of those deaths are preventable.

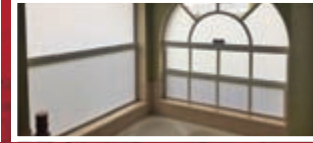
Her nomadic 26th year wasn’t always easy, but it was also the year that she chose, with her passion for travel. It was a year that added to her thirst for visiting other places more than quenching it.

“That will never stop, there’s not even enough time in a lifetime.” ■



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