

Cajaun Cleveland crowned Miss Gallup Intertribal Ceremonial Queen

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
Friday, 02 September 2022 03:49



Cajaun Cleveland crowned Miss Gallup Intertribal Ceremonial Queen

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
Friday, 02 September 2022 03:49

Cajaun Cleveland put a lot of work into preparing for the 100th Gallup Intertribal Ceremonial Queen pageant. Before the competition, she competed in the Navajo Technical University pageant in November and won. Less than a year later, she became the Ceremonial Queen on Aug. 10.

In an interview with the *Sun*, Cleveland discussed what she had to do to prepare for the Ceremonial Queen pageant. She said she went to ceremonies, talked to people in her community, along with former queens, and overall just tried to become more connected with her culture.

“I really had to put a lot of work in, because I had a lot of self-doubt and I couldn’t think about that. I gained self-confidence throughout this process and I began getting connected culturally with myself,” Cleveland said. “It brought out the best person in the world that I could be.”

Cleveland is from the Diné tribe, and her clans are The Towering House Clan, born for the Bitter Water People, her maternal grandparents are of the Black Streak Wood People, and her paternal grandparents are of the White Mountain Apache people. She was born in Gallup, and currently lives in Timber Ridge.

She attends NTU as a nursing student and wants to become a midwife nurse after graduation.

In her free time she competes in rodeos. When asked if she has a special talent, she mentioned that she is one of the only women she knows of who can actually trim the horses’ hooves.

Cleveland said one of the reasons she wanted to become Miss Gallup Intertribal Ceremonial Queen was to inspire Indigenous youth.

“I also want to strongly encourage our youth to get connected with their cultural selves to make the best person out of them and to put their best foot forward every single day,” Cleveland said.

Cajaun Cleveland crowned Miss Gallup Intertribal Ceremonial Queen

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
Friday, 02 September 2022 03:49

Cleveland said one of her favorite parts of the competition was getting to know the other girls in the competition in the week before.

“We made the best bonds and the best relationships, and after the coronation they just went back home to their own homesteads. [...] They became my best friends within a week’s span,” Cleveland said.

The women competed in six different categories: traditional talent, traditional food, essay, photo, personality, and an interview.

Cleveland said the food competition was her favorite part of the pageant.

“Each of the contestants’ tables represented them and their personality as an individual. When you tasted [their cooking] you knew that it came from love, it came from the heart,” Cleveland said.

She made a traditional Navajo cake for that part of the competition.

“I did make it in the ground the night before because I wanted the judges to taste what it tastes like coming from the ground,” Cleveland explained.

Melissa Sanchez is the executive director of the Intertribal Ceremonial Office. Over the past couple of weeks since the pageant, she said she’s enjoyed getting to know Cleveland.

“Having gotten to know Cajaun better over the past few weeks, I feel she’s going to be a really great ambassador,” Sanchez said. “She’s familiar with the area, she’s familiar with the event. She truly does love her culture and she loves learning about it.”

Cajaun Cleveland crowned Miss Gallup Intertribal Ceremonial Queen

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
Friday, 02 September 2022 03:49

Sanchez said one of the things the judges look for when they're picking a Ceremonial Queen is that the woman has the potential to be a great ambassador for Indigenous people and an abundance of cultural knowledge.

Cleveland said one of her goals as the Ceremonial Queen is to get people to come out to the next Gallup Intertribal Ceremonial. "It's a really great event to attend, and I would only wish for more people to come out and experience this event and to really represent not only my Indigenous people but Indigenous people all over the United States [...]."

To see Cleveland's schedule as Miss Gallup Intertribal Ceremonial Queen and book her for events, go to <https://www.gallupintertribalceremonial.com/pageant/ceremonial-queen-schedule/>

By Molly Ann Howell
Sun Correspondent