

Juneteenth Royal Showcase builds friendship, Black pride

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Winners of the Mr. and Miss Juneteenth pageant were selected at the inaugural You Matter 2 Royal Court Showcase on Saturday, April 9. The program, held at the Flossmoor Community House, also acted as a conduit for the student contestants to learn and perform.

"The goal was really to get more youth involved in Juneteenth, add another aspect to our Juneteenth festival," said Destiny Watson, You Matter 2 founder and CEO who led the planning for the first H-F community Juneteenth celebration in 2021. You Matter 2 is planning for a 2022 Juneteenth celebration on Sunday, June 19.

"Students were able to learn more about the holiday, learn more about themselves, their peers, and really form a brotherhood and a sisterhood over the time of three months" before the showcase, Watson said.

The Royal Court winners are:

- Mini Miss Juneteenth Parker Duncan; first runner-up was Francesca Rios, representing K-grade 2.
- Little Mr. Juneteenth Evan Roberson and Little Miss Juneteenth Phallon Davis, with first runner-up Olivia Rios. They represent grades 3-5.
- Jr. Mr. Juneteenth Joshua Thomas and Jr.



Andrew Burke-Stevens/H-F Chronicle

Participants in the inaugural Royal Showcase await word from the judges.

Miss Juneteenth De-Aunta Burns, with first runner-up Julia Headd and second runner-up Angelique Smith. They represent grades 6-8.

- Miss Juneteenth is LaNiya Whitlock, with first runner-up Aniyah Davis and second runner-up Mysean Doby. They represent grades 9-12.

The showcase started with an introduction of each contestant, followed by a dance choreographed by Alexa Brown and a talent show that featured contestants reciting

poetry and giving musical performances.

After an intermission, contestants returned donning their formal wear. They each gave short introductions and stated their goals. Then they answered questions from the judges about Black history and the meaning of winning Mr. or Miss Juneteenth.

"My goal is to make sure everybody knows about the importance of Juneteenth," Little Miss Juneteenth Phallon Davis told the judges. "I will use my ex-

perience and exposure in this context to continue driving change on behalf of my ancestors who were enslaved up until June 19, 1865."

Following the announcement of the Royal Court, Miss Juneteenth LaNiya Whitlock reflected on the three months of preparation before the showcase.

"It's not just about winning, it's about meeting new people and making new friends and starting new beginnings," Whitlock said. "It helped me grow as a person because it helped me break out of my shell. Usually I'm staying to myself, not talking to people, but being around all these young people around my age, it helps me to understand that knowing people my age and having friends is just amazing."

Watson said the preparation period focused on making the contestants active community members by attending workshops, participating in a community service project and being available for rehearsals.

"This is the culminating showcase and everything that they've been putting together," she said.

At the end of the program, the contestants surprised Royal Court Coordinator Samira Barnes-Evans with special recognition for her help in bringing them together and guiding them through the process.

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