

# Finalists for St. Pat's Grand Colleen chosen

HOLYOKE – The five finalists for the 56th Annual Grand Colleen Pageant were chosen at William R. Peck Middle School last Saturday night. The five young women will vie for the title of Grand Colleen at the Log Cabin Banquet & Meeting House Saturday, Feb. 20.

Kate T. Caligaris, Bridgette D. Callahan, Rosolyn C. Chesky, Heather Duquette and Laura S. McDonough graced the stage and received the nods of the three judges. The pageant moved to Peck Middle School's auditorium this year because of ongoing renovations at Holyoke High School.

As is tradition, the Holyoke Caledonian Pipe & Drum Band kicked-off the event when the unit marched into the auditorium. The Holyoke High School Madrigal Choir performed the national anthems of the United States and Ireland.

Mayor Elaine A. Pluta and her husband, Ted, were in attendance, along with members of the Holyoke City, and other notables. Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade Committee President James Leahy welcomed guests.

Kathy Tobin returned in her role as mistress-of-ceremony, as she tried to quell the nerves of the 18 contestants. The young women cradled a long-stem carnation in their arm, which helped mask the stress and strain of taking the long and lonely walk across the stage. Holyoke Firefighters escorted the contestants off the stage.

The contestants, who were judged on poise and appearance, wore a colorful array of evening gowns. The judges met with contestants earlier in the day, where each was asked about their background and resume.

Before the finalists were announced, 2009 Grand Colleen



The five finalists (l to r) Kate T. Caligaris, Rosolyn C. Chesky, Laura S. McDonough, Brigid D. Callahan, Heather L. Duquette smile wide for the camera.

Ashley Tucker was joined on stage by her court of Kaleigh Clark of South Hadley, Alexandra Grass of Holyoke, Caitlin O'Neill of Holyoke and Bridget Sullivan of Holyoke. She praised the colleen contenders before the 2010 court was announced.

Tucker said she became close with her court and noted their academic and professional accomplishments over the past year.

"What I did not realize was how much of an honor being a colleen truly was," Tucker said as she reflected on her experience. "Throughout January, February and March of 2009, we attended countless award dinners, Irish night celebrations and other special events. On each occasion we acted as

ambassadors for the city of Holyoke and with the face our great city."

Finalist Laura S. McDonough, of Holyoke, is the daughter of Maryann and the late-John McDonough. She is a senior at Bryant University in Rhode Island, where she is majoring in finance. She said the experience can be nerve-racking at times, but she enjoyed the overall experience.

"Just being with the girls in back, we shared all the same feelings. Then when they called my name, I didn't expect it. It's a great feeling," said McDonough who was surrounded by family supporters after the pageant.

She said her strong, Irish heritage and growing up around the pageant

were some of her reasons for entering this year's pageant.

"All the upcoming events that we have are going to be fun, just being with the five girls; it's a great court," McDonough said. "I got to know them a little back stage and all the events we will go to will be fun regardless who wins."

Bridgette D. Callahan, also of Holyoke, said entering the pageant was worth it in the end. Callahan is friends with the 2008 Grand Colleen Ashly Reidy.

She said the former colleen not only gave her advice on how to survive the walk across the stage, but that Reidy let her borrow the dress she wore two years ago in the pageant.

"She gave me every tip she could," Callahan said. "Basically, be yourself, that's the only tip you can give."

Though all five finalists will ride the float on parade day, only one will be crowned Grand Colleen on Saturday, Feb. 20.



Grand Colleen finalist Brigid D. Callahan



Grand Colleen finalist Heather L. Duquette



Colleen finalist Kate T. Caligaris



Grand Colleen finalist Laura S. McDonough



Grand Colleen finalist Rosolyn C Chesky



St. Patrick Parade President James Leahy gives an Irish welcome.



All 18 contestants await the announcement of who the winners would be.



Ashley R. Tucker, 2009 Grand Colleen, spoke about her past year

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