

Not Your Mother's Beauty Pageant Anymore

The Reinvented Business Model of Donald Trump's Miss Universe Organization

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH AVA ROOSEVELT

To sit sandwiched between three of the most beautiful women in the world in the back of the stretch limo provided by the Miss Universe Organization, I must admit, took guts. On the way to the New York Fashion Week event, we crawled through midtown traffic under the watchful eye of Matt Rich of PlanetPR, while the girls worked their iPhones. Rich, who, for the past 16 years nurtured and chaperoned contestants around the globe, was the only other person in the car old enough to remember when Donald Trump purchased the contest in 1996.



*Miss USA 2012 Nana Meriwether and
Ava Roosevelt*



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Erin Brady, Miss USA 2013



**Olivia Culpo,
Miss Universe
2012**

The pageant was founded in 1952 by California clothing company Pacific Mills. Today, under Trump leadership, the Miss Universe Organization (MUO) is a highly profitable international business. "Donald Trump's ongoing vision, to reinvent the static brand, leads the way for the astute business day-to-day decision of MUO's President, Paula Shugart," Rich said.

South Florida Opulence sat down with Trump, Shugart, the reigning Miss USA 2013, Erin Brady, Miss USA 2012, Nana Meriwether, and Miss Teen USA 2013, Cassidy Wolf, to discuss the more modern approach that has breathed new life into pageantry. What prompted Trump to acquire an organization that was once viewed as 'trivial events whose interpretation required no scholarly effort?'

"I love and respect beautiful women, that's the first and very good reason," Trump said.

"I could also see a good platform for a successful broadcast. Money could be made and NBC agreed. It has been a resounding success, with each year topping the last. We have a huge worldwide audience and it is the gold standard of all pageants."

A TASK RIPE WITH CHALLENGES

Given the complexities of all the titleholder's personalities, managing to achieve flawless, live television productions and overseeing off-the-air lives of so many participants involved, was no easy feat. "We have an extended team that looks after the safety and health of each contestant," said Shugart.

It took years (and Trump's marketing genius) to restore luster to the pageant's worldwide perception, and to create the Miss Universe Organization.

Miss Universe, Miss USA and the less watched Miss Earth and Miss World, are today the largest beauty contests in the world, earning NBC and the Miss Universe Organization hundreds of millions of dollars during Trump's reign.

Defying the most widely proclaimed misconception that beauty is all that it takes to achieve the pinnacle of world's most competitive contests, these young women are well-educated, well-mannered and intelligent. They reflect the much desired (and required) global perspective of a beautiful woman of substance. Since I watched the Miss USA Pageant live in Las Vegas last summer, it was obvious to me that Erin Brady 'nailed' her 2013 Miss USA title for the way she answered the dreaded final question, which is

the most difficult part of the pageant. Miss Utah was a sure winner until a panel of judges started asking the 'final question': Why do women get paid more for jobs than men do, and what would you do about it? Miss Utah froze, blinked and Erin nailed it. Brady, with a degree in finance and a minor in criminal justice, is a former accountant for Prudential Retirement in Hartford, CT. She was the first woman from the state to be crowned Miss USA. "It taught me so much about myself and being confident no matter what," said Brady. "Pageants tend to be negatively portrayed to many people, but what they don't see are all of the personal benefits these women achieve after competing."

Often, well-publicized scrutiny is placed on reigning titleholder's behavior by the Miss Universe Organization and Trump himself. One would be mistaken to assume 365 days of each title holder's reign is a leisurely stride. These young women clock long hours, promoting self-esteem, social organizations and fundraising for charities.

As we stepped out of the limo, the attention on Cassidy Wolf, Miss Teen USA 2013, would have been overwhelming for any other 19-year-old. Cassidy handled it with poise. She has been awarded several scholarships to the Jeffrey Ballet.

Nana Meriwether, 28, 2012 Miss USA, is the oldest contestant ever to be crowned. In New York, she is making serious strides, recently becoming 'the face' of Younique, a cosmetic conglomerate promoting women's empowerment. The daughter of sports icon Delano Meriwether (the first African-American medical graduate of Duke University) and a South African mother, she heads the Nana Meriwether Foundation, which focuses on her native South Africa.

"We provide health, education, nutrition and empowerment-based programs in impoverished communities of South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi," Meriwether said. The titleholder's perks include digs in Manhattan, about \$100,000 a year and, in some cases, college scholarships. Skeptics may claim that few titleholders would flourish without well-defined guidance and the organization's support. But after spending considerable time with Brady, Meriwether, Wolf and Miss Universe 2012, Olivia Culpo, I can personally confirm these women have serious smarts and make their parents proud wherever fate takes them. ●

Cassidy Wolf, Miss Teen USA 2013

