

This year, it's Grandma's turn



All in the family Katie Sautter (right), the new Elkhart County 4-H Fair senior queen, gets a hug from the 2007 fair queen Mekayla Diehl. Diehl is Sautter's granddaughter and passed her crown to the new fair queen Friday night. 180690 J. Tyler Klassen

Hours before the 2007 Elkhart County 4-H Fair queen passed on her crown, another family member picked one up. Katie Sautter, grandmother to last year's queen, Mekayla Diehl, was named the 2008 Senior Fair Queen. When she heard her name called, she was shocked. "My knees were shaking," said Sautter, a Bristol resident.

by: NO AUTHOR

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By Kelli Yoder

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GOSHEN -- Hours before the 2007 Elkhart County 4-H Fair queen passed on her crown, another family member picked one up.

Katie Sautter, grandmother to last year's queen, Mekayla Diehl, was named the 2008 Senior Fair Queen. When she heard her name called, she was shocked.

"My knees were shaking," said Sautter, a Bristol resident. "All of us were so involved and well-qualified. I really don't know why (they chose me)."

Diehl wasn't nearly as surprised. She credits the win to her grandma's warm heart and shining personality. She was on the stage with Sautter and the other 10 contestants, as well as last year's senior queen, Rachel Maurer.

"She's worked so hard," Diehl said. "Everything seemed to play right into place."

Emcee Ginny Nichols noted the extra-long hug between Diehl and her grandma as the crown was presented to Sautter.

"Mekayla, did you twist your grandmother's arm to do this?" she asked Diehl.

"Mekayla and Miss Rachel asked me," Sautter said later. "My granddaughter is just wonderful. She said, 'Oh Nonny, you can do everything with me because I'll be there to help you.'"

Her granddaughter was still wiping her eyes after several songs by the "Truth in Jazz" Big Band entertainment that followed the announcement of the winner.

For the past 10 years, Diehl and her 13-year-old brother, Chip, have lived with Sautter following her parents' separation when Diehl was 9.

"She's worked so hard to give us the life that we have, and we are blessed," Diehl said. "It's time for her to be in the spotlight for a change."

To make it to the spotlight, Sautter, along with the other 10 contestants, was judged based on community involvement, a personal interview, appearance and an on-stage question.

For hers, Sautter was asked to give advice to young parents.

"Be consistent in your discipline and never be afraid to give too many hugs," was her immediate response.

The fair is an important part of Sautter's and her family's lives. She brought her grandchildren to compete in the fair every year and married her second husband, Ted, on the fairgrounds.

She's an active member of Elkhart County 4-H Souvenir Committee and attends River Oaks Community Church. Sautter is a member of Mason Union Garden Club and American Quarter Horse Association. Her hobbies include horses, tennis, reading, sewing, gardening and spending time with her family.

She's got five children, 11 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, but Diehl said that's only the beginning.

"She's been an Aunt Kay to everybody. She's everybody's grandma," she said. "She deserves this so much."

Donna Lantis of Nappanee was named second runner-up and Rosalie Bontrager of Middlebury was first runner-up. Bontrager will take over should Sautter be unable to fulfill her duties.

For the first time this year, a Ms. Congeniality award was voted on by the competitors. The winner was Janice Yoder of Goshen.

Sautter wants more people to have the fun that she did throughout the pageant.

"I would encourage more women to do this. They can represent their community and learn more about the 4-H fair," she said. "I just made 10 great new friends."

A performance by Tom Netherton of "The Lawrence Welk Show" followed "Truth in Jazz." He sang hymns and other musical numbers, most known as "Welk" favorites.

Netherton, a regular at the Elkhart County 4-H Fair, was named an honorary Elkhart County veteran and presented a flag. It was Senior Citizens'/Veterans Day.

"This is a wonderful thing," said Netherton. "Thank you very much."