GOOD NEIGHBOR

Leilani Soon



Photo courtesy Mahina Yates

Kids can dream of becoming artists, pilots and more. A handful will pursue these dreams, but even fewer prevail and accomplish them, too.

Leilani Soon's dream sparked at 9 years old when she watched ballerina and Miss America contestant Heather Whitestone perform Sandi Patty's *Via Dolorosa* and win in 1995.

She recalls thinking to herself, "I want to do that someday. I want to dance for God on big stages, and I would love to be Miss America."

While she didn't become Miss America, her recent title, Mrs. National U.S., was awarded in August and is only one example of Soon's determination to pursue her dreams — all of which, Soon has accomplished, but not without challenges.

After dealing with low self-esteem in high school, when Soon finished college, she found the courage to enter the Narcissus Pageant in 2008 (her first) and was named Narcissus second princess and Miss Congeniality. But more importantly, she gained new friends and learned more about Chinese culture, which helped her to embrace her own Chinese-Hawaiian heritage.

Eventually, she would also be named fourth runner-up for Mrs. USA Globe, Mrs. Hawai'i Globe, Miss Hawai'i International and more.

Through her pageantry travels, Soon has enjoyed building intercultural understanding and aims to spread an awareness and appreciation for Hawaiian culture.

Becoming a Hawaiian Airlines flight attendant — after five years of trying to get the job — is one way she reached a global audience.

Another way is through dance.

Currently, Soon lives out her dream as a hula dancer and teaches at The Royal Hawaiian, a Luxury Collection Resort, Waikīkī and Sheraton Princess Ka'iulani. She also schedules dancers through her organization, Alohalani Productions.

Soon also choreographs sign dance at New Hope O'ahu and uses her background working with Abraham Lincoln Elementary School hearing-impaired students.

The public is invited to attend the free Hearts In Motion Hō'ike at 6:30 p.m. on Nov. 8 at New Hope O'ahu, which features a variety of performances, including Soon's students doing sign dance. For more info, visit nhodance.org.

While she has many new dreams to chase, she hopes to speak to youth in schools and to motivate women of all ages to win not only in pageants, but in life.

"It's important to have a dream and … to protect your dream, and then never give up on it," Soon says. "Originally, I wanted to be Miss America and I'm not exactly Miss America, but I'm something related. I want to tell them that their dream can sometimes take a slightly different path, but it still can kind of be connected to what was in their heart originally — as long as they never give up."

Keep up with Soon on Instagram (@iamleilanisoon).

— Allyson Pang

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LONGS DRUGS (EWA BEACH)
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Honolulu, HI 96706

Oct 28, Nov 4
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Oct 29
TUESDAY 4:00pm - 6:00pm
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Oct 30 - Nov 9
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WED & FRI 4:00pm - 6:00pm
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