

Miss Rodeo America fortunate to be from Colby

By Heather Temple
2007 Junction City Rodeo Queen

2008 Miss Rodeo America Amy Wilson, 21, is the daughter of Lonnie and Lori Wilson, and who has five supportive siblings, Kayla, Brenda, Sally, Dana, and Brent. Amy and her family call the town of Colby home.

Amy headed out to the Miss Rodeo America pageant in Las Vegas as Miss Rodeo Kansas 2007 on Nov. 30, 2007. She returned home on Dec. 17, 2007, as Miss Rodeo America 2008. Amy is the second queen from Kansas to hold this prestigious title. The first Kansas winner was Diana Putnam Friend, Miss Rodeo America 1980. It might have taken Kansas 30 years to have another Miss Rodeo America, but the wait was definitely worth it.

Don't let the big hair, pretty face and crown fool you, this girl can rope and ride with the best. A rodeo queen and cowgirl, Amy has competed with the Colby Community College Rodeo team, junior rodeos as well as Kansas High School rodeo. Her events included barrels, poles, goats and breakaway roping. She's excited about her new barrel horse but confesses to her favorite event of roping. Amy is truly an asset to the sport of rodeo, not only is she their spokesperson but is also a seasoned competitor herself.

Amy graduated from Colby Community College with an Associates of Science degree in Agribusiness and Associate of Arts in Communications. She plans to continue her education at Fort Hays State University and pursue a career in ag-related television broadcasting with the goal to become a broadcaster for televised professional rodeo.

A product of what she speaks, Amy is a devout Christian, never hesitating to profess her faith. Being truly genuine and kind were traits that made her the winner of the personality category in Vegas. The other categories that Amy won include: appearance, speech, and photogenics.

When asked what her favorite part of the pageant was she replied, "It was all great, there were so many awesome events." Later, she confessed that her favorite part was being with all the other 27 girls. She said they were all incred-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Miss Rodeo America Amy Wilson, (center) is surrounded by her family: from left, Sally, Dana, father Lonnie, Amy, mother Lori, Brent, Brenda and Kayla. Amy won the honor in December and will tour the country this year promoting the sport of rodeo.

ible and extremely supportive, especially her roommate whom she had never met, Miss Rodeo Michigan, Kaytie Zudiema, and one of her new best friends, Miss Rodeo Utah, Jenna Whitiker. Amy truly enjoyed hanging out with them, as well as the great friends she had made throughout the year.

As Miss Rodeo America Amy will be attending many rodeos and will be riding a variety of horses as a rodeo representative. At the MRA pageant, there is the horsemanship competition. It enables each contestant to display their talents and riding abilities. The ladies compete on two different horses in two different patterns. One pattern is given to them, and the other is a freestyle pattern that the competitors must come up with on their own. Amy had been preparing for her freestyle during her entire reign as Miss Rodeo Kansas — there were going to be no unexpected surprises in Vegas for her. She attended the MRA seminar in Amarillo, Texas where American Quarter Horse Association professionals gave helpful hints on how to pull off a beautiful freestyle pattern.

Bronc and Kate Rumford invited her to their home so she could get the feel of different horses, and Kate helped her create her pattern. Later when Amy was home practicing the pattern, she realized it was over the time limit, so she

went to her friend Joy Cole to help her tweak the pattern to fit the allotted time. It was a lengthy process, but she says it was all worth it. She wanted a pattern that would show off the qualities of the horse she was on, and had several versions of the pattern in case there was something her mount wasn't the strongest at. She drew the first slot in the freestyle pattern and felt confident with her ride. She says her one regret of the whole pageant was not winning horsemanship. "I wish I could have won horsemanship because being a cowgirl and good horsewoman is so important to me and a necessary skill to represent rodeo." Even though she may not have won horsemanship at the pageant, she is still an outstanding horse woman, and is an amazing representative for the sport of Professional Rodeo.

The MRA pageant was judged by four judges, two men and two women. Joy Murray, who just happens to be Ty Murrays mother, Annie Bianco Ellet, Dee Oakeson, and Steve Stevens who is a past American Quarter Horse Association president.

Amy said that Joy Murray set up a time for all the contestants to meet her son Ty Murray, also known as the "King of Cowboys." He gladly gave all the contestants signed autographs...now that's the kind of judge every queen dreams about. Amy was offi-

cially crowned the 53rd Miss Rodeo America on Saturday Dec.8, 2007, at The Orleans Hotel show-room by 2007 Miss Rodeo America Ashley Andrews. Amy said that immediately after she was crowned, all the girls swarmed her with hugs and well wishes. She then made her first walk as Miss Rodeo America 2008, waving and smiling her thanks. Then she was quickly ushered off stage and into another room where she met with her overjoyed and exceptionally proud family before she was off to her first press conference wearing her brand new Montana Silversmith belt buckle and carrying the unique Black Hills Gold MRA tiara on her white Bailey hat. Amy made her first queens run as 2008 Miss Rodeo America on Sunday, Dec. 9 during the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo at the Thomas and Mack Arena in Las Vegas.

Amy said, "It was awesome — I loved it."

This year is going to be truly amazing and unforgettable for Amy, her family, and the state of Kansas.

Amy said, "I feel blessed and am very thankful to everyone for their prayers and support.

"I'm excited that this is God's plan for me and I look forward to a great year!" We are so fortunate to have such an upstanding spokeswoman come from the Land of Oz.

Governor intensifies campaign for health reform plan

TOPEKA (AP) — Gov. Kathleen Sebelius is ramping up her campaign for a comprehensive health reform plan and trying to overcome legislative opposition to increasing tobacco taxes to pay for it.

The plan would phase in a \$227 million increase in spending on health care initiatives over five years. Most of the money would provide health coverage to poor and working-class families, either through the state or by subsidizing private insurance.

Supporters believe the state can't afford the new spending without raising additional revenues, and they see higher tobacco taxes as a logical source. Sebelius also doesn't want legislators to split those initiatives from others designed to encourage preventive care, improve Kansans' overall health and lower costs.

Sebelius had a news conference Thursday at Stormont-Vail HealthCare with members of the Kansas Health Policy Authority, which drafted the 21-point plan. Also participating was Sen. Jim Barnett, a physician and Emporia Republican who ran against Sebelius in 2006.

Also, the governor's staff released a list Thursday of 45 organizations and 27 health officials or public health advocates who support the plan.

The Legislature convenes its 2008 session Monday and its leaders and Sebelius see health care as among the most important issues. The Health Policy Authority, formed in 2005 to review health care issues, spent months working on its plan before releasing it in November.

Sebelius said keeping the plan intact is important to making

the sweeping changes in health care.

"Certainly, a payment stream is critical as you look at new services, new opportunities for Kansans," Sebelius said. "That's why I think it's very important that the package be looked at as a package, and hopefully the Legislature will see it that way and not pick out bits and pieces. If that happens, we're likely to have some very uneven results."

The Health Policy Authority's plan would increase the cigarette tax by 50 cents a package, to \$1.29, then keep increasing it each year with inflation. It also would increase taxes on other tobacco products by 57 percent. The changes would generate between \$61 million and \$65 million a year, according to legislative researchers.

Sebelius proposed similar increases in tobacco taxes, also to finance health care initiatives, at the end of 2004 but legislators ignored her proposal.

"It's going to be a tough sell," Barnett acknowledged. "I think we need to start at the very top and not come down or be brought down from the beginning because we think it's going to be difficult."

Sebelius and public health advocates argue that it's logical to use tobacco taxes because tobacco use increases health care costs. Also, other states' experiences show that when the tax increases, young people smoke less.

But the GOP-controlled Legislature generally is skeptical of raising taxes, fearing it will hurt the economy. Some also argue that any growth in tobacco tax revenues won't keep pace with rising medical costs.

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