

Miss Universe more than skin deep

Keyna Fryer

The WA Miss Universe competition is setting a benchmark for successful women, according to its organisers.

Miss Universe WA talent co-ordinator Sophia Ulgiati said the competition was more than simply walking on stage in a bikini.

Ms Ulgiati said this development reflected the progress of women's rights over the past 50 years, with more expected of Miss Universe as women take more prominent roles in the world.

"The changes in pageants over the years may correlate with the progression of women's rights," she said.

Hundreds of entrants applied this month, with 60 girls selected as state finalists.

In March six state finalists will be flown to Sydney for the chance to be crowned Miss Universe Australia in the national final.

Miss Universe judges assess contestants on intellectual and physical qualities.

Ms Ulgiati said WA finalists were offered physical and mental training.

"We want to ensure that the finalists representing WA epitomise the fit, healthy image that is associated with Miss Universe," she said.

"They should be beautiful on the inside as well as on the outside.

"It's a great thing that walking around in a bikini is not enough any more — contestants must also prove they are intelligent, driven, politically aware and socially responsible."

EGAMI Style managing director Natasha Di Ciano provides personal and professional image workshops to the top 20 contestants to improve their confidence, poise and public speaking skills.

"We will be assisting the girls in moving their attention away from their com-



UNIVERSAL SMILES: Competitors Megan Newberry, Jade O'Neill and Laura Johns at Miss Universe golf day at The Vines last week. Photo: Becky Johns

petitors and rather focus on themselves and their positive attributes," Ms Di Ciano said.

"We will then support them in enhancing these qualities to convey an image that is confident, authentic, beautiful and the ideal ambassador for all young women in Australia."

Ms Di Ciano said Miss Universe was

a worthwhile competition that set a positive example for young women.

"[Miss Universe] is an excellent platform for young women to develop confidence and pursue their career and life goals," she said.

Contestant Jade O'Neill said she applied to join the 2010 Miss Universe contest to make a difference in her com-

munity. Ms O'Neill said Miss Universe was not just about the competition but also community support.

"It's not about cheap promotion and exploitation, it's about making money for charity and that's really important," she said.

"They're doing it for the right reasons and that's really positive.

"I've done other modelling competitions and you often feel a bit used and abused but Miss Universe is different ... [it's] allowing us to be more than just bikini models, as a pretty face alone doesn't mean much these days."

Ms O'Neill said the competition created a new standard for beauty contests nationwide.