

Local Educators Get Credit for Green Bay Native's Amazing Success

By Stephen J. Busalacchi

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Education is key to Green Bay beauty queen's success as a physician

Tina Sauerhammer was 14 years old when she became a student at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. At age 18, she not only became the youngest person to graduate from that institution, but was class Valedictorian, as well.

"The staff at UW Green Bay were so helpful in incorporating me into that environment," says Dr. Sauerhammer, now a surgical resident at University of Wisconsin Hospital in Madison. "My success has everything to do with what wonderful teachers they were."

But Sauerhammer's educational odyssey began long before college. At age two, she attended Montessori Children's World in Green Bay, where the school emphasized "learning by the senses." Students advance at their own pace and Sauerhammer's was a particularly rapid one.

"By the time I was done with seventh grade, I actually already completed my high school curriculum," she recalls. With an eye toward medical school as early as age two, Dr. Sauerhammer says she decided to move forward to her college education rather than repeat what she already learned by attending high school.

One might not normally think of somebody so brainy as also being interested in competing in beauty pageants, but that's exactly what Sauerhammer did.

"What a lot of people don't realize is the Miss America organization is the world's largest scholarship program for young women," notes Sauerhammer. After winning Miss Green Bay, she also competed for Miss Madison and Miss Wisconsin, and won those titles, too. Those accomplishments netted her about \$50,000 in scholarships.

And that's where the pageant portion of her life was supposed to end, as she had little interest in drawing any more time away from her medical training. But after Sauerhammer's father died waiting for an organ transplant, she decided to compete one more time. This final attempt would be for a national title.

"My whole goal was to become Miss America so I could be a voice for organ donation," she recalls. Although her father never told her this, Sauerhammer later learned that her dad missed the opportunity for the kidney he desperately needed because he was attending one of her pageants and missed the call from the transplant center.

She fell short of being named Miss America, but Sauerhammer did use her position as Miss Wisconsin to tell her story and educate people about the need for organ donors.

"You can preach about whatever topic you want until you're blue in the face, but people don't listen until you have a voice. For me, my crown was my voice," says Dr. Sauerhammer.

She credits her family for her success in school, describing her father as a scholar. "He was definitely where I got my brains from," says Dr. Sauerhammer.

She's the first doctor in her family and the first to graduate from college.

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Stephen J. Busalacchi is a medical journalist and author of *White Coat Wisdom: Extraordinary doctors talk about what they do, how they got there, and why medicine is so much more than a job.* The book is available at the Reader's Loft in Green Bay. See www.whitecoatwisdom.com for more information.

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