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New royalty, Sweetheart partner, old favorites at 78th festival

Regulars of the National Sweetcorn Festival are used to the royalty that comes each year in the form of queens who would like to be Miss National Sweetheart. This year's festival has a new category of royalty that's a little closer to home.

Hoopeston Jaycees, who sponsor the annual festival, this year added the Sweetcorn Festival King and Queen contest. The online-only event sought nominees of those 65 and older, who love the Sweetcorn Festival and Hoopeston community, said event chairman Lauren Linares.

The contest was announced on Facebook in early July and when voting ended on August 12, the winners cho-

sen were Marguerite "Marg" Swan Shoufler and Mile Lawson. Both will be featured in the grand parade starting at 10:30 a.m. Saturday.

While the National Sweetheart Pageant isn't new, organizers have a new affiliation from which to draw National Sweetheart contestants.

This year, the pageant began a partnership with the Miss Volunteer America Pageant, with all contestants being runners-up in their home state's Miss Volunteer Pageant, Linares said.

While never officially a part of the Miss American system, previous to 2016, first runners-up from state pageants leading to Miss America would come to Hoopeston to compete, with many then trying again for Miss America. From 1980 to 1985, five former National Sweethearts went on to win the Miss America crown.

In 2016, Miss America officially distanced itself from the National Sweetheart Pageant and prohibited all state candidates from competing at the Hoopeston pageant.

This pageant has a field of 15 vying to be Miss National Sweetheart. Miss Hoopeston Lexie Breymeyer, is their hostess for their visit here.

Preliminary competition will begin at 6:30 p.m. Saturday, with finals at 6:30 p.m. Sunday. Online tickets are \$25 for Saturday and \$30 for Sunday or \$30 and \$35, respectively, at the door.

The other new thing this year was the creation of Friends of the Festival donation program, which gave festival enthusiasts the opportunity to donate to their favorite festival activity, such as the pageant, demo, and others. "We would like to thank all of our donors who supported various areas of the 78th festival," Linares said. All donors will be featured on a banner placed near the corn line and in the festival book.

It wouldn't be a festival without crowd favorites, and this year's celebration will be no different. Demo derbies will be held Saturday and Sunday, sponsored by Hoopeston Jaycees and On the Gas Promotions.

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