

Communitynow

PROFILE

Ariel Cao

Occupation

MISS TEENAGE B.C. 2016

Why is she in the news?

A Burnaby North Grade 12 student has just been crowned Miss Teenage British Columbia 2016 and is now setting her sights on the Miss Teenage Canada title. Eighteen-year-old Ariel Cao was named Miss Teenage B.C. 2016 on April 3 and heads to Toronto in July for the national competition, where she will compete against more than 70 contestants from around the country. Cao

won the Miss Teenage Burnaby title in 2014, and since then, the honour roll student and Burnaby school board ambassador has endeavoured to use her pageant platform to advocate for staying active. The *NOW* caught up with Cao following her win to chat about being an unlikely beauty queen and her views on modern pageantry.

—Tanya Comisso



YOUNG ACHIEVER Ariel Cao with her Miss Teenage B.C. crown, at left, and above, competing in this year's Burnaby's Got Talent contest. PHOTOS MIKE WU (LEFT), CORNELIA NAYLOR (ABOVE)

Q+A

How does it feel to have won Miss Teenage B.C. 2016? Was the competition fierce?

It is such an honour to have won Miss Teenage B.C. 2016! I could hardly sleep the night I was

crowned – that weekend went by real quick. I am so thankful for my family, friends, teachers, and people in my community – everyone has been extremely supportive throughout this journey.

There were 21 girls in total, ages 14 to 19 from all over B.C. I tried very hard not to compare myself to the other girls because it

would have been extremely stressful, since every contestant was beautiful, intelligent, talented and successful. My biggest competitor is always myself. I believe in self-motivation and

in having confidence in my own abilities.

When you won Miss Teenage Burnaby 2014, did you have any idea it'd lead to this?

When I first entered the pageant world in 2014, I wasn't really expecting anything. I joined the pageant to live my princess dream, and soon I realized that the crown comes with a respon-

sibility. During my year of reign, service to the community was a mission. I fundraised for Free the Children, the pageant's official charity, and I kept a

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She's a book nerd, athlete, musician and pageant girl

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personal blog for updates on my accomplishments within my community. There are many scored areas of a pageants – specifically Miss Teenage Canada – that we don't always consider, such as interviews with judges, charitable contribution, events attended, platform, charity fundraising, blogging, social media marketing and behaviour.

What is it that draws you to pageantry?

Pageants have boosted my confidence, have pushed me to become a better public speaker, and have given me the opportunity to connect

with people from different backgrounds.

Is there anything you hope to use your Miss Teenage B.C. platform to promote?

My platform is encouraging a healthy lifestyle, as well as taking a step towards developing a healthy mind. I believe that it is important to take a break from technology and get our blood pumping through physical training. As Miss Teenage B.C. 2016, I hope to motivate more people to become active. I will be volunteering for charities focused on health, and I hope to inspire others to stay fit through

having a healthy lifestyle.

You say you're not the average beauty queen – what sets you apart?

At school, I wear a big pair of black-rimmed glasses, and I have been on the honour roll all throughout high school. When the bell rings at the end of day, I quickly change into cleats, dash outside onto the turf, and join my teammates for ultimate frisbee practices. I am that student who takes accelerated honours programs and enrolls herself in 11 advanced placement courses. When I attend events in my crown and wear a fancy dress, a lot

of people are genuinely surprised when I tell them my favourite subjects are mathematics and computer science. I have a very calm side and a very energetic side. My violin teacher gets heart attacks when I tell her that I can't attend class because I am snowboard racing in Whistler. I am proud to be a book nerd, an athlete, a musician, an artist and a pageant girl at the same time.

What was your favourite part about competing in Miss Teenage B.C. 2016?

My favourite part would be meeting a group of beautiful friends, all with dif-

ferent and diverse backgrounds. Everyone has fascinating stories to tell and I learned a lot from the experience.

What's next for you?

In the months to come, I will be making appearances and volunteering all across the Lower Mainland. I will also be fundraising for Free the Children. From July 17 to 24, I will be in Toronto competing for the crown of Miss Teenage Canada 2016. I will be graduating from high school in June and I look forward to studying computer science at UBC.

What would your re-

sponse be to anyone who could perhaps view pageantry as antiquated?

I think it is time that we step away from stereotypes and focus on accepting people from all backgrounds. The pageant standards have also recently shifted to be more inclusive. Beauty is defined as not only inner and outer beauty, but also the ability to influence others in a positive and optimistic way. The girls who win titles such as Miss Teenage Canada are not only beautiful but also intelligent, ambitious, outgoing and talented.

Follow Ariel on Instagram and Twitter @MissTeenageBC16 for updates.