

Retiring royalty have had a memorable reign

By **LINDA HALL**
Staff Writer

NASHVILLE — Amanda Johnson has seen it all, at least in Ohio.

As Holmes County Antique Festival queen, presiding over 43 festivals across the state, she has traveled as far north as Milan for the Melon Festival and as far south as Jacksonville for the Old Settlers' Reunion.

Princess McKenna Johnson estimates she has logged more than 4,500 miles traveling to 34 festivals.

There were times when Amanda, 18, a 2007 graduate of West Holmes High School; and McKenna, 11, a sixth-grade student at West Holmes Middle School, didn't feel like royalty.

"We had to get up ridiculously early," said Amanda, the daughter of Wade and Kim Johnson. At times hungry, hot or grouchy, "we didn't want to be there (at a celebration)."

McKenna, the daughter of Brad and Kerri Johnson, would occasionally whine on the morning of an event, not wanting to get her hair done, her mom recalled. But that attitude didn't last very long.

After they arrived at an event, they would see the group of friends they had made at previous festivals and think, "We're good," Amanda said. "We'd see our friends, eat, and we were fine."

Were there funny anecdotes, embarrassing moments, times of triumph?

"All of the above," Amanda confirmed.

Dead car batteries accounted for the majority of less-than-stellar moments, particularly when they stalled out just as the parade started.

According to McKenna's farewell speech, it was "really cold" at the Dalton Holiday Festival, "extremely hot" at the Obetz Zucchini Festival, and hot and humid at the Jacksonville Old Settlers Reunion. It rained in Dennison, and one of the members of the court got car sick on the way to Dover.

But, McKenna said, she made more than 20 new friends and counts it a privilege to have toured the state of Ohio as a representative of "our festival and our county."

Amanda's good memories of the past year encompass "all of it. It has all been amazing. I'll remember it all — from the first practice (for tryouts) to the last walk when I crown the new girl (as queen)."

A memorable moment recounted by each of the girls was their first time aboard a boat. They had been wishing for the opportunity on the way to the Vermilion Festival of the Fish on Father's Day, when Brad Johnson decided to take matters into his own hands.

Without warning, he pulled into a driveway of a home on the harbor and asked the owner — who, at first was startled, then happily complied — to permit the girls, attired in their finery, to pose for a picture on his boat.

Each also enjoyed an overnight stay at a hotel over Labor Day weekend, when three festivals were scheduled.

"If we didn't stay in a hotel, we would have had to get up at 4 a.m.," McKenna pointed out.

Pulling out pictures triggered other memories, as did charms they collected throughout the state.

"Like a memory book on a bracelet," Kim Johnson said.

In their roles as queen and princess, they had the opportunity to see things they otherwise would have missed, such as the operation of the drawbridge at the Lorain International Festival, and meet people they wouldn't have encountered, including the Bremen Oil Derrick Days' chaperone, who brought two huge boxes of doughnuts to share with royalty at each of the festivals.

Before the parade lineup, "we'd go find him," Amanda recalled.

At the top of their list as they look



Submitted photo

Holmes County Antique Festival Queen, Amanda Johnson, 18, and Princess McKenna Johnson, 11, are veterans of the parade route, having attended 43 and 34 festivals, respectively, across the state during their reign.

back over the year is appreciation — for their families and all who made their experience possible, and for their home.

"... now I know how very lucky I am to live in such an extraordinary place. Everywhere I went I would have people tell me how much they love Holmes

County and how friendly everyone here is," Amanda said.

The two Johnson girls aren't the only ones who felt good about their reign.

"We're very proud to walk behind them and be their moms," Kim Johnson said.



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