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## The man behind the Miss Maine pageant

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**Q:** So, a lot of guys would like to have your job . . .

**A:** That's what they say!

**Q:** What do you actually do?

**A:** My job as producer is to actually put the pageant's stage show on. Which means selecting the music, costuming, coordinating with technical and sound directors. . . . Basically to make sure the Miss Maine pageant looks as close as possible to the main national pageant. This will be my 21st year as producer.

I also get Miss Maine ready for the national pageant - that's a different responsibility. This is my third year as the head of the preparation team, but I've done Miss Maine's hair since I volunteered in 1977 to do the hair of contestants in local pageants. I've served as hairstylist for many other state titleholders and "coiffed" many former Miss Americas.

My role in the preparation team has grown over the years, so now I oversee everyone else working with her.

**Q:** How many people is that?

**A:** There's six members of the team, working in different areas, and we all have our own little "teams" of friends and people who come in to help. For instance, Kimberly Grover is in charge of the interviewing

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Staff photo by John Patriquin  
Robert A. Towle, producer of the Miss Maine pageant, works with Megan Beals, Miss Maine 2005, last week on a gown for the national pageant next month. "Every Miss Maine comes to me with



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section, and she brings in people to conduct the mock interviews.

**Q:** Who else is involved?

**A:** Anna Friedman is physical fitness coach. Audrey Sindlen is liaison between Megan (Beals, Miss Maine 2005) and the pageant. We have Allyn Warner Gamble, who was Miss Maine 1971, in charge of Megan's talent (singing). Allyn was fourth runner-up and overall talent winner in 1971. She's back here after a 30-year career performing in Las Vegas. We're so lucky to have her lend her expertise.

Valerie Crooker Clemens, who was Miss Maine in 1980, is in charge of the wardrobe. She lives in Philadelphia and she searches there and in New York and gets great deals, but every year we're up against contestants from Hawaii and Texas who have \$100,000 for their wardrobes. We have \$2,500.

It's unbelievable in other states, the support from the community. For instance, every year Miss Hawaii has a \$10,000 gown donated by a local designer.

**Q:** Does that help in the pageant?

**A:** Hawaii has won twice since 1990. . . . Miss Maine has not been in the top 10 since 1971.

**Q:** And Megan?

**A:** She's got a great shot at it. She has everything a contestant needs to have to bring the title to Maine.

**Q:** How many women compete to be Miss Maine?

**A:** This past year I think there were 14. This year we already have 17, I think, and we have one more qualifying day left.

**Q:** Do they come from anywhere particular in the state?

**A:** They tend to come from Aroostook County. I don't have my book in front of me, but I think seven of the last 12 have been from the County. Megan is from Houlton. The odd thing about this year's qualifiers is there's no one from Aroostook County, so maybe the rest of the state can have a chance!

**Q:** What are the requirements to be a contestant?

**A:** You have to be age 17 to 24 - age 18 by Labor Day. A high school graduate who is in college or planning to go. You cannot be married, you have to be a citizen of the U.S. and have been born

different talents and abilities and looks. What I try to do is enhance those qualities that made them Miss Maine in the first place," Towle says.

#### **ROBERT A. TOWLE**

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Hairstylist since 1976; now at Amore in Portland

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a female.

**Q:** Er, has that been an issue?

**A:** Well, yeah, I guess there was a boy who wanted to enter.

**Q:** So the national pageant is soon?

**A:** Megan leaves for Las Vegas on Jan. 9. She'll be in Los Angeles doing publicity for a couple of days. Then they will all travel to Las Vegas in a bus and arrive all at once. Then there are rehearsals and appearances with sponsors. . . . I leave (for Las Vegas) on the 17th. The pageant is on the 21st.

**Q:** And you deal with?

**A:** The hair and makeup and choreographing the walking, the onstage presence. Which is the thing Megan is having the hardest time getting ready for.

**Q:** Why?

**A:** It's hard to put your body through different positions, just to stand in one way and look natural in a swimsuit on stage, so she looks like a million. If she doesn't hit that, she looks like \$999,999.99. This is the fine-tuning I try to do with everybody.

**Q:** Do you also have a music and drama background?

**A:** I had a number of years of training in different areas of music and dance lessons over the years. I was on Dance Fever, a national competition for disco dancing, in the late '70s. I've been in a lot of local theater productions.

**Q:** Do you get paid for this?

**A:** No, we are all volunteers, there's a huge volunteer network.

**Q:** But it involves expensive travel and professional time . . .

**A:** Some people play golf, and look how much time that takes. This has been my hobby for 25 years, a big part of my life, and what I might have lost financially I've gained in many other ways. In friendships, for instance.

This summer, though, I am now starting my own pageant consulting/preparation business, CrownMe. But I will work only with other pageant systems.

**Q:** Ever have differences with a Miss Maine you're advising?

**A:** I offer only opinions and suggestions based on 25 years of experience . . . and there have been times when people have not done what I've asked, but the bottom line is, this is their one and only chance. Next year I'm going to have another one.

But really, the decisions are all theirs. If they hadn't already won a title, I wouldn't be advising them in the first place. It's nothing to do with me. It's about helping them present themselves better.

**Q:** How much of the preparation is natural versus cosmetic?

**A:** You know, every Miss Maine comes to me with different talents and abilities and looks. What I try to do is enhance those qualities that made them Miss Maine in the first place. I try to bring out the finer points in every aspect.

**Q:** Do you hear much criticism of the pageant as a sexist thing?

**A:** I don't necessarily hear criticism. It's not as controversial as it was back in the (late '60s), when protesters burned bras in Atlantic City. It's more a question of apathy - people just don't care one way or the other. Until they become involved with the pageant in some way, and that changes their mind, because it's such a wonderful organization. I've seen it happen a hundred times. You don't have to be a contestant to benefit.

**Q:** Does it help to be a blonde?

**A:** I think a study showed that brunettes and blondes have been equal. Every contestant brings her own special qualities, and the beauty is such a small part - the talent and the interview count for 70 percent of the score.

The interview is the most important part, but it's the part the general public does not see since it isn't televised. A lot of times someone can't understand why the prettiest or most talented or the girl with the most beautiful gown doesn't win.

A lot of times it's the talent (that decides) . . . But the swimsuit stays in there. It's a tradition - the way the pageant started in 1921 on a boardwalk in Atlantic City, to extend the summer season. From that, it's gone on to be the largest scholarship foundation for women in the world.

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