

Our Fashions

Connecticut women get chance at 'Top Model' status

By MIKE CHAIKEN
EDITIONS EDITOR

Tyra Banks wasn't there.

But her presence loomed over the proceedings last Thursday all the same as Foxwoods Resort and Casino hosted a casting call for Banks' reality series, "America's Next Top Model." One-hundred-fifty women had a chance to be the one who would get a chance to meet with producers in New York City possibly to be on the show.

The women waited patiently on seats and on the floor for a chance to stand before the days' judges to see if they were going to be the one model from the casting call to move one step closer to becoming "America's Next Top Model." Off along the side of the room, each model selected for the final 150 had a quick snapshot taken of them by "ANTM" production staff. And as the models had their photos taken, a large cut out of Tyra Banks oversaw the proceedings.

Some of the women attended Thursday because friends, family and acquaintances said they had what it takes to win.

"People tell me all the time (I should be a model)," said Kayla Tilton, 18, of Bristol when asked why she traveled to the casino to take her chance to win a slot on the show.

"I came out because people asked me why I



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Abbey Tessier of Bristol struts her stuff at the 'America's Next Top Model' casting at Foxwoods last Thursday.

haven't tried out (because I'm 5'11)," said Bristol's Tamara Simone, 23.

"I saw it in the newspaper. It was a good opportunity and it's hard industry to get into," said Molly Reid, 22, who works at Health Consultant Group in Plainville when asked what brought her down to

Foxwoods. Although she never modeled before, the nursing student said since she is 6 feet tall people often told her she should be a model.

Some of the women came because they were fans.

"I love the show," said 19-year-old Ariel Ford of Plantsville when asked what brought her down to Mashantucket for the casting. "It's one of my favorites. I've watched it since middle school so I decided to try out."

Some had modeled before and wanted to further their career.

"Modeling has been my passion for many years," said 20-year-old Abbey Tessier of Bristol when asked why she decided to stand before judges at the casting. "I decided to take a step forward and do something," said Tessier, who has modeled regularly for the Observer's "Our Fashion" pages.

And Simone also saw it as a chance for self-improvement. An assistant branch manager for Webster Bank in West Hartford, Simone said the casting call for "ANTM" was a chance "to take myself out of my comfort zone... You only have one life to live."

Inside the ballroom, the potential contestants were judged on their appearance (close-up, 25 percent; full-length, 25 per-

cent); their runway walk and pose (25 percent); and their response to a series of questions (25 percent).

Bristol's Shana Pilewski was one of the first ten girls to appear before the judge. Dressed in boyish attire, Shana told the judges that the show needed more hip tomboys such as herself. And if she was cast, she said, she would bring "some goofy awkward and uncomfortable humor to the show... I don't take myself too seriously." Asked what she would do to get on the show, she told judges she would do most anything as long as it doesn't impair her morals or values.

Prior to the judging, Tilton, a Bristol Central High School graduate, was asked to make her pitch for why she should be on the show. "I'm awesome, I'm different. I'm serious. There's no one like me," she said.

"I think I can bring positive energy to the fashion industry," said Ford, a student at the University of Connecticut when asked to make her pitch. "I work hard for what I want. I can do it."

"I'm an outgoing person, very sociable, not shy at all," said Reid. And since she is a nurse, she said she's involved in keeping people healthy, which is important in the modeling industry.



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Bristol's Shana Pilewski listens to a question before the judges at the casting for 'America's Next Top Model' last Thursday.

"I have enough experience...," said Tessier when she was asked prior to the judging why she should be "America's Next Top Model." "I have the heart for it,"

said Tessier.

As for how winning the competition would affect her life, Tilton said, "It would open the doors to everything."

And Simone said, "If I can win it, I can use it as a gateway to get other girls to come out of their comfort levels... I'm no one special. I'm a plain Jane... If it happens to me. It'll inspire other girls to do the same."

"(Winning) would change things for my family," said Ford. "It would be a new experience. You can't always tell the future. It's hard to tell now, but it's going to be positive."

The winners of the casting call were as follows:

Sarah Siakie of Bronx, N.Y., 21, was the first place winner. The architectural/technology student at NYC College of Technology won a guaranteed front of line audition with a "America's Next Top Model" casting director in New York City, \$250 American Express gift card, and a digital camera.

Asia Smith of Cheshire, 21, came in second place. She is an accounting student at Central Connecticut State University. She won an iPod Nano and \$100 American Express gift card.

Camilla Lidonde of Thompson, 18, came in third. She will be attending La Salle University. She won an iPod Nano.



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Kayla Tilton, left, and Tamara Simone, both of Bristol, wait for their chance to appear before judges to win the opportunity to meet with producers of the reality series, 'America's Next Top Model.'



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Molly Reid, who works in Plainville, shows her model skill at the casting call.