

OUR OHIO WHEELCHAIR NETWORK

Ms Wheelchair Ohio  
2008 Pageant Review



## Shari Cooper of Dayton Ohio crowned Ms. Wheelchair Ohio



The 2008 Ms. Wheelchair Ohio pageant was hosted at Recreation Unlimited in Delaware Ohio on April 12, 2008. This annual event, which is part of the Ms Wheelchair America program, continues its tradition since 1972.

Shari Cooper competed against four other candidates from various locations across the state. Each of the five 2008 candidates had amazing stories and would have represented the honored position with dignity.

Carol Tolson, the state coordinator for the 2008 Ms Wheelchair Ohio event, and the former 2006 Ms Wheelchair Ohio, stated that this pageant is in no way a beauty contest. It is instead a competition to select the most accomplished and articulate spokesperson for the millions of Americans with disabilities. The selected representative must be able to communicate with both the needs and the accomplishments of her constituency to the general public, business community and the

legislature. Carol continues - In my humble opinion, I think it is a beauty contest, reflecting the deep and pure beauty which arises from overcoming obstacles many would never have dared to challenge - with or without a wheelchair."

Shari will go on to the 2008 Ms. Wheelchair America pageant hosted in Rockville Maryland July 21-27, 2008. This national event is never easy, for the competition Shari will face is very competitive, but she is ready for the challenge and represent Ohio like a champ.

Inside this edition:

**Ms Ohio Wheelchair**

Full story and review.

Special thanks to

Phil Caskey

for sharing his photos  
and to help create this  
Ms Wheelchair Ohio

Check out our website  
for all event information.

More about the 2008 Ms. Wheelchair Ohio pageant on page 2.



2008 contestants from right to left are: Krista Baron of Strongsville, Shari Cooper of Dayton, Margaret Long of Cincinnati, Elizabeth Shank of Newton Falls, and Danielle Brown of Danville

All of these ladies were awesome candidates and very promising individuals. There were no last place positions. Everyone who participated had a very dynamic personality and were already ambassadors to disability awareness. Best wishes to everyone who supported this event and continues to educate and enhance others that live their lives on wheels.



### Carol Tolson

Carol Tolson opens the pageant by introducing each of the contestants. Carol had the honor of becoming the official State of Ohio coordinator in February 2008 and put this event together in under two months. Carol stated "It was my honor to serve as Ms Wheelchair Ohio in 2006. Now it is my privilege to serve as the new state coordinator. While thinking small this year, I have a huge vision for the Ms. Wheelchair Ohio program as we make new friends and future volunteers."

### Krista Baron

Krista Baron of Strongsville is 26 years old and has a daughter, Hannah, age 3. Her ambition is to graduate with a bachelors degree in criminal justice before continuing to law school to become a juvenile attorney. She hasn't let her disability slow her down, maintaining a 4.0 GPA while serving on the Community Emergency Response Team in Strongsville. Only settling for the best, she strives to prove wrong those who tell her what she cannot do.



### Danielle Brown

Danielle Brown is 24 years old and lives in Danville. She plans to finish school this May and pursue a career as a secretary. She has won gold and silver medals in swimming at the Special Olympics and is the treasurer for an action club for people with disabilities. She enjoys snot tubing and playing with her dog, Belle. She describes herself as a survivor, persistent, optimistic, caring, and sensitive.



### Shari Cooper

Shari Cooper is a 35 and lives in Dayton. Her long list of achievements include a Disability Hall of Fame Award, Goodwill Industries Achiever of the Year, and an Associate of Applied Sciences degree in Disability Intervention Services. While not serving on the Consumer Advisory Commission Service, board of Dayton Advocates, Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, and as Secretary of the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, she enjoys shopping and spending time with her four brothers and sisters.

### Margaret Long

Margaret Long, 36, hails from Cincinnati, and plans on becoming a motivational speaker. She works for Cease Fire Cincinnati, whose mission is to reduce or stop gun violence. She also hopes to finish school and start her own business. She is a member of Toastmasters and feels that achievement is very important. Her philosophy is that while disability is a challenge, it helps one to challenge different tasks.



### Elizabeth Shank

Elizabeth Shank of Newton Falls is 34 years old and married to John. She is a peer mentor for others with a SCI and has won or taken 2nd place in several wheelchair sporting events and air pistol / rifle events. Her favorite past time is cross stitching although she also enjoys turkey hunting (harvesting her first bird last year), horse back riding, and watching bull riding and NASCAR. Her philosophy is that there is much more to life than being in a wheelchair.

### Judges

(from left to right)



### Mel Trese

Mel is from Delaware and has been in a wheelchair since 1990 from an auto accident. He has turned his life into a motivational learning experience where he enjoys teaching people to stay positive in their lives.

### Stacy James

Stacy James, from Dublin, is the former 2002 Ms Wheelchair Ohio and second runner up for Ws Wheelchair America has become very inspirational in her effort to promote disability awareness.

### Leekay Bennett

Leekay Bennett of Delaware has been a contestant for the Ms Wheelchair Ohio several times and won Mother of the Year 1999 by Eagles Auxiliary. Being in a wheelchair since 1978, she had fulfilled a life of community service and was inducted into the Ohio Hall of Fame for Delaware County for her service as a Senior Citizen volunteer.



### David Hudler and Shawn Dunaway

David (left) and Shawn (right) were the 2008 Ms Wheelchair MC's. The both did a great job keeping the pageant moving and keeping the audience entertained. Both David and Shawn are employees of the Recreation Unlimited, the facility that hosted this years event.

Plans are to host the 2009 Ms Wheelchair Ohio at this same facility.



The Boy Scouts Troop 108 started the pageant by bringing in the US flag and leading the Pledge of Allegiance. Then the Boy Scouts brought all the pageant contestants on the stage for the formal group picture.

Once finished, each of the contestants would return to the stage to complete the final two questions that were judged.

The contestants spirited with ambition as they all had a very good chance to be the next 2008 Ms. Wheelchair Ohio.



During the final moments of the judges tallying up their decisions, a live performance from the Sweet Adelines entertained the crowd. This Barbershop style group sang 5 songs of various generations. Their talent fit nicely into this event. With a quiet desperation after the final song, the judges decision was finally ready. Both of the MC's were handed the envelopes and the names were etched into history. Second runner up - Krista Baron / First runner up - Elizabeth Shank / and Ms Wheelchair Ohio for 2008 - Shari Cooper!





Congratulations to the 2008 Ms Wheelchair Ohio winners and best wishes in the National Competition—Ms Wheelchair America!

Special thanks to Phil Caskey for sharing his photos!



**Ms. Wheelchair  
America**

*A Program of Achievement, Advocacy, and Opportunity*

Organized in 1972 by a Columbus, Ohio physician Dr. Philip K. Wood as a forum for the promotion of the achievements, as well as the needs of, people with mobility impairments, Ms. Wheelchair America recognizes the accomplishments of women who utilize wheelchairs for mobility. The non-profit program which consists of the State Coordinators and State Titleholders has grown to include programs in more than 20 states and the District of Columbia. The state programs are staffed and coordinated by volunteers dedicated to

increasing public awareness so that all citizens will be afforded the opportunities to lead productive and meaningful lives. The mission of Ms. Wheelchair America is to provide an opportunity for women of achievement who happen to be wheelchair users to successfully educate and advocate for the more than 52 million Americans living with disabilities. Unlike the traditional beauty pageants, Ms. Wheelchair America is not a contest to select the most attractive individual. It is instead a competition based on advocacy, achievement, communication and presentation to select the most accomplished and articulate spokesperson for individuals with disabilities. The selected representative must be able to communicate both the needs and the accomplishments of her constituency from across the nation to the general public, the business community and the legislature. As Ms. Wheelchair America, the national titleholder has numerous duties. These include promoting awareness of the need to eliminate architectural and attitudinal barriers, informing the able-bodied public of the achievements of the millions of people with disabilities across the nation, and assisting with the establishment of programs in all 50 states by promoting Ms. Wheelchair America. During her year long reign, she will have the opportunity to travel, visiting advocacy groups, making public appearances and conducting radio, print ad TV interviews. e commitment and personal example of the titleholder serves to further the mission of Ms. Wheelchair America.