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FEATURED

## Overcoming depression, anxiety new Miss Kenosha ready to soar

By TERRY FLORES [tflores@kenoshanews.com](mailto:tflores@kenoshanews.com) Feb 10, 2019 Updated Feb 11, 2019



Lily Karnes performs during the talent portion of Saturday's Miss Kenosha pageant.

PHOTO BY PAUL WILLIAMS

Lily Karnes admitted she was anxious, even mortified, as she waited for the curtains to rise just moments before she would perform a most unique dance before the more than 1,000 people who watched Saturday night's Miss Kenosha pageant at St. Joseph Catholic Academy's upper campus auditorium.

Suspended 18 feet in the air for her aerial acrobatic routine, Karnes, an 18-year-old senior who attends the academy, was nervous, alone.

And then the curtains rose. And she could not only hear, but feel the buzzing from the crowd.

"That was insane hearing all the people," said the newly-crowned Miss Kenosha, who had just finished a four-hour rehearsal on Sunday for her part as a dancer in the school's upcoming performance of "Shrek." "But right when the curtain lifted, I was at home. At peace. It was awesome."

The butterflies that were in the pit of her stomach making her heart jump had flown off, and she felt the energy of the crowd and summoned it to motivate her through the twists and turns of daring grace, the aerial silks wrapping and embracing her every move through the minute-and-a-half long routine to the tune of Lauren Daigle's "Rescue."

In many ways, her lofty performance in the talent portion of the competition, and indeed her win as Miss Kenosha, represents a victory hard fought from within.

Karnes wasn't always so confident. In fact, she said she had wrestled with long bouts of depression and anxiety that, up until a year ago, she would not have been able to reveal.

"Depression and anxiety is something I have been working through and dealing with for a majority of my life," she said. "I didn't seek help for a very long time."

But it was a month before the end of the summer last year that her issues with confidence and "longing to get up and live life" caught up with her.

Her older sister, Emma, who she is very close with, was going back to college, and it triggered something.

"I think, at that point, I had so much build up from years past, I couldn't take her leaving," Karnes said. "I had a breakdown. I was crying, and the anxiety attacks came uncontrollably."

It was then that she realized she needed help. She summoned the strength to tell her parents and her sister that she couldn't keep suppressing what was eating her up inside.

Though her world was turned upside down, her family was "so supportive, finding me the best help I could possibly have."

"I am still struggling with it. It changed me and changed something in me. I thought I was never going to be the same," she said.

At first, she thought she was unfixable, she said.

She was diagnosed with depression, anxiety and ADHD, something she thought was normal for her and that she just had to put a smile on her face and bear.

After the diagnosis, her therapist told her the four words that empowered her.

"You are not alone," Karnes said, remembering the breakthrough session. "In that instant I broke down in tears. I'm not like this because I'm a horrible person; I'm like this because of a condition and one that is treatable."

## Platform

Her platform, educating students and the public about the signs of anxiety and depression and combating the stigma surrounding it, is something she will be delivering in her year as the reigning Miss Kenosha and as she prepares for the Miss Wisconsin pageant, which will take place in mid-June.

“She’s preparing for that, as well as the entire year of service (as Miss Kenosha),” said Joya Santarelli, local pageant organizer and Karnes’ godmother and first cousin.

Santarelli said that Karnes grew around the pageant — she was born the week that Santarelli, then the reigning Miss Wisconsin, had advanced to the Miss America pageant in 2000.

“When she decided she wanted to compete, I told her it’s going to be a lot of work,” Santarelli said. “And, she pulled it off.”

Now there are three Miss Kenoshas in her family. Santarelli’s mother was also a Miss Kenosha.

The history, expectations and pressure to excel aren’t lost on Karnes. But, she feels not so lost anymore, either.

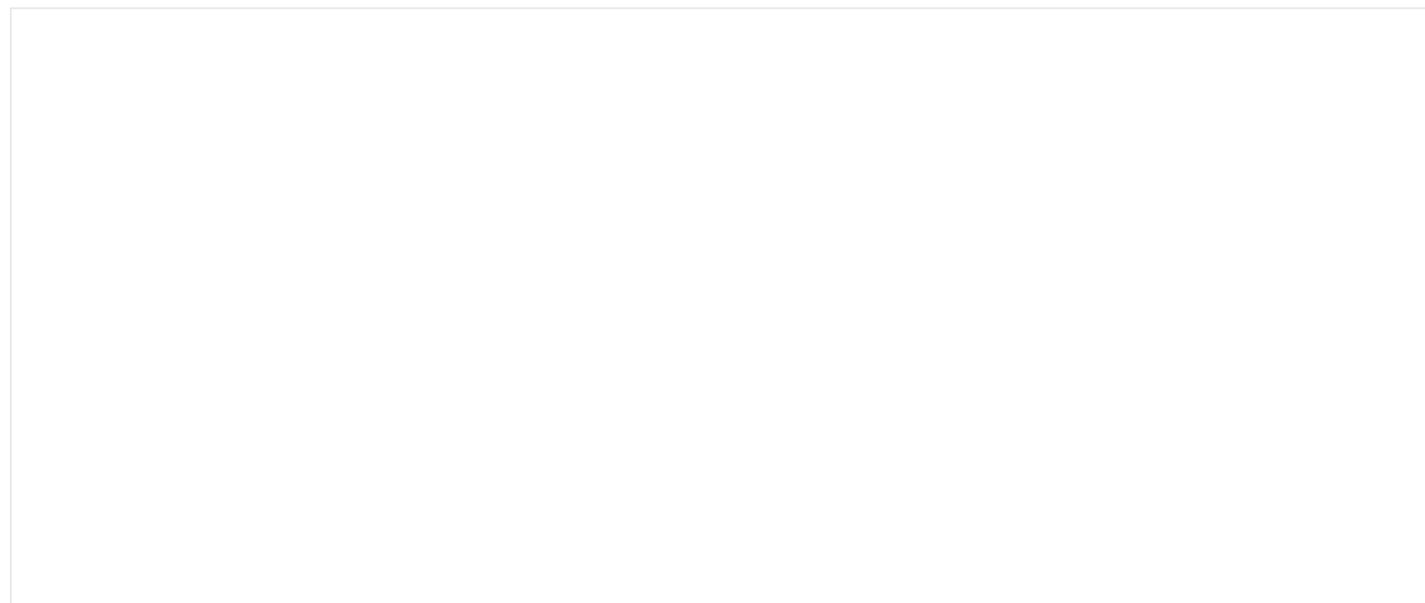
“I gladly accept constructive criticism. My platform — I am so passionate about has driven me to get through and to help me and has encouraged me to get to Miss Wisconsin,” she said. “And, I can’t be more thankful to represent this city. I’m so honored to be representing it. I will do whatever it takes to make this city proud. I’m ready to build relationships with everyone.”

## Planning for college

Beyond the pageant, Karnes plans to carry on her platform into her college years. She plans to attend the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where she will double major in psychology and dance.

She dreams to one day open up a counseling center for adolescents, where she’d be doing therapy through the arts.

### MORE INFORMATION





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St. Joseph senior captures Miss Kenosha crown



Terry Flores