



Vivica Lewandowski.

INTRODUCING MISS TEEN ILLINOIS 2023

Story by **LISA STAMOS**  Photography by **CARLOS VELEZ**

Barrington High School Class of 2023 graduate Vivica Lewandowski has not only earned her crown this year as Miss Illinois Teen USA and was awarded Miss Congeniality, but she has also made pageant history. This is the first time for the Illinois pageant that a mother and daughter both won the crown. Vivica Lewandowski's mom, Mandy Lewandowski, is a former Miss Illinois USA titleholder who won Miss Illinois USA in 1998. The team at Quintessential Barrington is proud to introduce you to Vivica Lewandowski, the 2023 Miss Illinois Teen USA.

Where did you grow up?

I spent most of my childhood in North Barrington, I attended Roslyn Road Elementary School, then Prairie Middle School. I just graduated on June 2 from Barrington High School.

Did you participate in sports, arts, or clubs?

I was always active in school. I was on the Barrington dance team for most of my high school career, and I loved performing at football games and competing in competitions against neighboring schools. I also was involved in many clubs, my favorite being Chinese club. I always enjoyed learning about Chinese culture and of course enjoying my favorite, Chinese food!

Did you ever think you'd compete in a pageant when you were little?

Yes, and no. As a child I was always extremely shy and self-conscious. I was always tall for my age and being the tallest girl in my class made me very self-conscious. When I was younger, I rarely spoke in public and was always quiet, especially around adults. However, my mother always encouraged me to be

confident in myself. Ever since I can remember, I have idolized my mother. She was and still is to this day my biggest role model and is herself a past Miss Illinois titleholder. I remember being young and seeing my mother's Miss Illinois USA crown and always wanting to play dress up with it on. Through the years I eventually came to the realization that it was something I wanted to earn for myself. Competing in this pageant to me meant continuing a legacy in our family by following in my mother's footsteps.

What did you enjoy doing as a child and teen?

Though it may be hard to believe, I grew up being a tomboy. I loved fishing, riding dirtbikes, and everything outdoors in nature. My grandparents live in the South, and my grandfather has a great farm that I love to visit. I felt at home being outdoors, surrounded by wildlife and in nature.

While growing up, my schedule was chaotic because of competitive dance. I feel that it helped shape me and mold me into the person I am today. Dance taught me to be determined, disciplined, hard-working, and healthy. It built my character and personality.



At this year's pageant I was fortunate enough to also win Miss Congeniality. I believe that is a testament to my upbringing and my parent's number one rule stemming from Luke 6:31, "Treat others the same way you want them to treat you." I believe that being friendly to everyone and helping those around me whenever they were in need not only helped them, but also improved my pageant experience by creating friendships along the way.

Growing up, did you have a role model?

Growing up my mom was always my biggest role model. My mother was Miss Illinois USA in 1998. I can still vividly remember walking around as a little girl with her crown lopsided on my tiny head. I would always daydream and pretend I was on stage in a beautiful dress. As I grew older, I began envisioning that one day I could follow in her footsteps and continue her legacy. Having the crown brings along some great opportunities and enables the holder an ability to be heard by a wider audience. I have seen my mother do some amazing things through the years for our charity Chicago Charity Clays which supports American Veterans and I want to continue that work. As Miss Illinois Teen USA I can spread my platform to a broader audience that can help bring awareness to different causes and to have more influence to help make a difference.

Unlike others who compete in pageants, you didn't start as

a child, but rather at age 16. What prompted you to make the leap?

Preparing for Miss Illinois Teen USA was something I wanted to do for myself. All the training for the past three years has helped me to better myself in many ways. I have seen dramatic improvements in my health, my public speaking skills, interview skills, and my overall confidence.

What were the first steps you had to take to get started in the competition?

The very first step I took was to strengthen my confidence. There is a lot of mental preparation that goes into pageantry. Contestants are constantly being judged on multiple aspects of the competition and we must always be confident in who we are, regardless of the outcome.

Was there anything in your teen years that helped give you the confidence to go for it?

Performing on a stage in competitions for dance helped me get the confidence to go for it and dramatically helped me to have a stronger stage presence.

What is the investment to compete?

It is not cheap to compete in the pageant, however, the more well-known you get in the industry, the more opportunities come along for sponsorships. For example, as I prepare to compete for Miss Teen USA, I am fortunate enough to have sponsors to help me with the cost of being in this competition. It is also a huge time commitment to prepare for a national pageant. During all my pageant preparation I have missed out on a lot of time at home with my family and friends. I am thankful for my support system of people who adjusted their schedules to make my dream a reality through lots of training. Overall, this process takes a lot of sacrifice, but I wouldn't change it for the world.

What did you learn from those past competitions?

When I competed in 2022, I was grateful and proud to have placed as first runner-up with so little pageant experience. Coming in as runner up, but not achieving my dream last year was very hard. After time, I realized that it was what was best for me, and it allowed me to have time to focus on improving myself. The extra time helped me prepare for this year's state competition and ultimately, for Miss Teen USA, this October.

Some pageants reward beauty, fitness, and presentation.

How were you put to the test?

There were three stages of the competition: interview, fitness, and evening gown. Miss Illinois Teen USA values finding a role model to represent the state at a national level competition. During the interview stage, contestants get pulled into a room where the five judges are sitting at a table, and they can ask you multiple questions. Contestants are expected to answer quickly, and it is an opportunity for contestants to show off their unique personalities and to share with the judges what they hope to spread awareness for if awarded the title. This opportunity to share your personal values and what makes you a good role model for the state is why the interview portion of the pageant is worth the most amount of points. Other sections included walking on stage in fitness wear, as well as an evening gown. I could not have asked for better preparation for these parts of the competition than the experience I have gained working as a runway model in Chicago for the past two years.

You've just graduated from BHS and won the Illinois crown. How are you taking this all in?

It's all so surreal to me, things have been moving at a fast pace! But I am loving it! This is exactly what I signed up for and I am beyond grateful for this opportunity and cannot wait to make the most of it.

What is your passion in community service?

My passion is and will always be, helping our nation's active military, veterans, and their families. Chicago Charity Clays is a charity that my family and I started to help U.S. Special Operations active, as well as veterans and their families. We host an annual fundraising event for the Special Operations Care Fund and over the years we have been able to raise and donate over \$1.5 million dollars!

As the new Miss Illinois Teen, how will you spend your time?

I will spend most of my time volunteering and giving back to the great State of Illinois that I am fortunate enough to represent. Aside from my philanthropy work, I will also be training for Miss Teen USA. It will be a great challenge for me and a lot of fun to compete against 50 other teens from across the country! I am very excited, but at the same time extremely nervous. I hope I can make Illinois proud.

Your mom won Miss Illinois USA in 1998 and competed Shreveport, Louisiana for Miss USA—a first for Illinois! What helpful advice did she give you?

The best advice my mom gave me was to be genuine. She always told me to be myself and to never change who I am to please anyone else. I was always taught to speak from my heart, have empathy for others, and to be my true self. Especially in interviews, the most valuable advice from my mom that I can pass down to others is to be articulate and educated on worldly events but be authentic. The judges are looking for someone who stands out in a crowd.

Tell us about your family's charity.


We founded an event eight years ago called Chicago Charity Clays. Our annual event raises money for an incredible charity, Special Operations Care Fund. The charity has a great relationship with many current and retired members of units such as Delta Force and SEAL Team 6. Our event hosts many of these veterans and they join us to raise money for their fellow members. The money we raise helps with traumatic brain treatments, different treatment programs, financial situations, and many other issues that may need addressing. It has been a very rewarding experience to see the improvements in recipients' lives. We have become very close with several of the veterans, and I now consider them family. I am pretty sure there are not many teenagers who can say they have "uncles" that were on the Bin Laden raid and other monumental missions that are a big part of our nation's history!

In October, you head to Nevada to compete for Miss Teen USA? How will that competition be different from the state level, and how will prepare?

This event will be much different because it will be a full week and much more intense. The entire experience will be on a larger scale, attended by many more people and viewed all over the country. I'll be competing against one girl from every state who had to previously beat out every other girl in their state to qualify for Miss Teen USA. To prepare, I am going to continue working on my interview skills and public speaking. I will continue living a

healthy and balanced lifestyle while pushing myself in the gym and mentally. I will be spending the upcoming months preparing for the competition and looking forward to meeting many incredible girls from all over the country.

If you could give any advice to young girls today, what would it be?

I would advise young girls today to have confidence in themselves. Speaking from personal experience, growing up and lacking confidence was detrimental to my growth as a person. I missed out on many amazing opportunities because of my fear of failure. I hope all young girls have the strength to go out and try to make new friends and to put themselves out there so that others can get to know them. I want them to have the confidence to say no to peer pressure and the confidence that no matter what some people might say, they stay true to their beliefs. 

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To contact Miss Teen Illinois USA Vivica Lewandowski, connect with the Miss Illinois Teen USA Instagram account @missilteenusa or email: missilteenusa2023@gmail.com.



A MISS ILLINOIS USA PAGEANT FIRST!

This is the first time in Illinois history that a former Miss Illinois USA titleholders' daughter has gone on to win Miss Illinois Teen USA.

Mandy Lewandowski won the Miss Illinois USA crown in 1998 and competed in Shreveport, Louisiana, for Miss USA. The pageant was broadcast by CBS with an expected worldwide audience for the pageant at 300 million. The event was hosted by J. Eddie Peck and Ali Landry. (Photo courtesy of Mandy Lewandowski.)