

# A Crowning Achievement



She wears a crown and can bale hay with the best of them. Marty Walker holds the title of 2017 Mrs. West Virginia, and she credits agriculture for her success.

“Every chance I get, I speak about West Virginia-grown products and West Virginia agriculture,” says Walker, who was crowned back in April. “It’s something I’m very passionate about.”

A title and a crown were the farthest thing from Walker’s mind growing up in Fayette and Summers Counties. She spent a lot of time with her grandfather on his farm near Meadow Bridge.

“I was my grandfather’s little side-kick. Everything he did with his cows and chickens and potatoes and corn, I wanted to do myself. I grew up feeding cattle with him, picking apples, watching him make hay. It’s just something I really love.”

Walker graduated from Meadow Bridge High School in 2005. She went on to earn a Bachelor’s degree in Agriculture Extension Education and a Master’s in Agriculture and Forestry from WVU. Her first job was with the West Virginia Department of Agriculture as a food inspector. She currently works for the West Virginia Conservation Agency serving the Southern Conservation District in Beckley.

It wasn’t until two years ago, after she married her husband Jacob Owen, that someone suggested she enter the Mrs. West Virginia Pageant. At first, she was hesitant. Not only was she coming late to the game, she also wondered

if she had the confidence to pull it off.

“Growing up raising animals and growing a garden is a far cry from evening gowns and glamorous make-up,” Walker laughs. “Then I realized I was guilty of the stereotypical assumption that you must be materialistic and it’s all about how you look. With Mrs. America, it’s not!”

As part of the pageant, the contestants choose



a platform, speaking out on an issue near and dear to their heart. Walker chose to promote West Virginia through agriculture, conservation and tourism, shining a positive light on the state.

“I had virtually no pageant experience when I entered Mrs. WV in 2016, but I came in third. I knew my platform, talking about locally grown food and products, was important,” stresses Walker. “That’s when I decided to give it one

more go. I made the promise that I would travel the state promoting the resources we have here and the growing opportunity with agriculture.”

Her passion won over the judges.

“When they called my name as the winner, I couldn’t believe it,” says Walker with a smile. “There are pictures of me laughing. I have my hands on my knees with this big laugh. It’s definitely not a posed pageant picture. It was real joy!”

Walker competed in the Mrs. America Pageant in August. She didn’t place, but more importantly she says, she spread the word about West Virginia.

“I got to speak to the judges, on a national level, in Las Vegas, on the positive aspects of our state,” stresses Walker. “I’ve had a lot of opportunities to leave West Virginia. There were job offers from Pennsylvania, Maryland, out West, but I refused to leave because I’m trying to encourage other young people to give our state a chance. Agriculture is a big part of that.”

Walker spends most of her weekends these days traveling the state as Mrs. West Virginia, visiting fairs and festivals. She plans to talk to as many people as possible during the remainder of her reign, touting the state. Once she hands over her tiara to her successor, Walker has a new mission.

“My long-term goal is to get my grandfather’s farm back up and operational to the fullest potential. It’s been in the family for over 100 years.” That, she says, will be her crowning glory.