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press release
Jan. 11, 2012, 8:50 a.m. EST

Miss America Hopeful Aids Effort to Reduce Lightning Deaths and Injuries



HARTFORD, Conn., Jan. 11, 2012 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ -- Ohio's contestant in the upcoming Miss America pageant never dreamed that participation in the scholarship competition would provide an opportunity to share her sister's story in hopes of saving others' lives. Miss Ohio, Ellen Bryan has been concerned about the cause of lightning safety ever since her older sister was struck by lightning 11 years ago. Her sister, who was 17 at the time of the debilitating injury, is restrained to a wheelchair and can't speak.



"When I started competing in the Miss America Organization, I chose lightning safety as my personal platform because of my sister, Christina who was struck by lightning in 2000," said Bryan, 23. "When you tell someone that you are a titleholder and would like to speak to their school, business or community about lightning safety, doors open without question--the crown serves as a microphone to help share your message," explained Bryan.

Bryan and her sister teamed with the National Weather Service in 2009 to produce a public service announcement about lightning safety. She has since continued volunteer efforts on behalf of the cause and has helped promote NOAA's annual "Lightning Safety Awareness Week" campaign each June. In fact, Ellen was crowned Miss Ohio last June on the eve of the annual safety campaign.

"Ellen has added a personal and important perspective to NOAA's lightning safety efforts," said John Jensenius, Lightning Safety Specialist for the National Weather Service, NOAA. "Unfortunately, Ellen has first-hand knowledge of just how devastating a lightning injury can be to both the victim and their family. We greatly appreciate her efforts in promoting lightning safety as Miss Ohio and wish her well in the Miss America Pageant."






Bryan continues her cause for lightning safety as she competes for Miss America on January 14, 2012 in Las Vegas where all contestants take a platform and bring attention to it. Bryan has good news to share about her cause, amid recent reports that 2011 will be a record low year for lightning fatalities. According to the National Weather Service, twenty-six people were killed across the U.S. last year, which is less than half the yearly average. Jensenius attributes the lower death toll in 2011 to the Weather's Service's commitment to lightning education and safety.

"In large part, the reduction in lightning fatalities is due to the efforts of many people and organizations who help educate the public on the dangers of lightning and provide safety recommendations," said Jensenius. "Undoubtedly the efforts of the Lightning Safety Awareness Campaign are being realized."

Bryan views the Miss America competition as an opportunity to continue lightning safety education on a broader scale, as she hopes to spread the message to national outlets and conventions. She also plans to record a new public service announcement to air prior to major outdoor sporting events, like football, baseball and soccer.

"This spring, I hope to have at least 20 Ohio counties adopt the Lightning Safety Toolkit," said Bryan. (The toolkit is a program designed by the NOAA team to increase lightning safety awareness at outdoor recreational venues.) "Lightning safety week also falls during

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the 2012 Miss Ohio competition, so I hope to include the contestants in a few lightning safety media blitzes, too."

"Ellen is a compelling and passionate supporter of lightning safety education," said Bud VanSickle, executive director of the Lightning Protection Institute (LPI). "As a Miss America contestant, Ellen will have an even broader platform to share her important message about nature's underrated, yet deadly risk."

The Lightning Protection Institute is a not-for-profit nationwide group founded in 1955 to promote lightning safety, awareness and education and is a leading resource for lightning protection information and system requirements. Visit www.lightning.org for more information.

More information about the Lightning Safety Awareness Week campaign (June 24-30, 2012) can be found at www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov.

SOURCE Lightning Safety Alliance

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