

## Grace Gentner – St. Mary's Academy

### **Inspiring. Tradition. Evolving. How do these three words describe the Rose Festival?**

The rose festival easily embodies the ideas of inspiration, tradition, and evolution. In fact, it's near impossible to think of the Rose festival without thinking of inspiration. Why? Because the Rose Festival court has been inspiring young women to become leaders since 1907. While the 1907 rose court encouraged leadership in the princesses by making them role models and community figures, it has since become a whole new program involving job shadowing, etiquette lessons, and community outreach programs. It no longer simply inspires leadership, but emboldens and prepares princesses to pursue the future of their dreams. However, the rose festival does more than inspire its court, it also inspires the Portland community. Back in 1918, the rose festival was cancelled due to WWI. However, it was up and running the next year, stronger than ever. In fact, the 1919 rose queen was named the goddess of victory, celebrating both America's and Portland's success after the war. Better yet, it motivated the Portland community to push through the post-war hardships and continue to strive for glory. Even without a goddess of victory, the festival today continues to celebrate the values of volunteerism, patriotism, and environmentalism. The festival's focus on such important values is one reason that it remains a central tradition in Portland. The rose festival started in 1907, inspired by a speech from Mayor Harry Lane. Mayor Lane suggested that there be a "festival of roses", and while the rest of his speech was quickly forgotten, this idea of a rose festival stuck. Although some people may say the rose festival's fun events are what make it a valuable tradition, I believe it is the festival's ability to illuminate our city's singularity. In addition to displaying the beautiful roses, the festival always reveals the incredible creativity, beauty, and individuality present in Portland. But the rose festival's long history makes it more than a city tradition, it's a family tradition. For my family, it connects me to my grandmother. Because my grandma passed away when I was three, I never got to know her. However, I do know that she adored the rose festival. I discovered this when I stumbled upon a mysterious bag in my attic containing pins from almost 40 years of the rose festival. When I asked my dad about the bag, he explained my grandma's love for the classic Portland tradition, how she not only attended the festival every year but bought a pin as well. So while I never got to enjoy my grandma's company, I always feel connected to her while watching the festival that brought her so much joy. But I also understand that the rose festival has evolved and changed since my grandma last saw it. In fact, evolution has been key to the festival since its beginning. The parade we know as the

starlight parade was once the leading attraction of the festival. It fascinated and mystified everyone with its electric floats, which trooped around on Portland's trolley system. This display of engineering and science captured people's attention and illustrated how innovative Portland was. However, the shine wore off. Instead of disregarding the event, the rose festival committee transformed it to meet the people's needs: it became the Merrykhana Parade, attracting people instead for its humorous entries and occasional rowdiness. Then in 1976, it became the starlight parade, known for funky and eclectic fun. But the court has also faced some changes. When the festival began facing financial issues and a lack of interest from the community back in 1929, it created a new election system for the court: voting in princesses from high schools. By involving local high schools, the festival regained people's attention and garnered greater communal support for the court. Ultimately, I know that, as the world changes, the rose festival will be able to roll with the punches and continue its role as a relevant, inspirational Portland tradition.

