

Southcoast native, previous Miss New Bedford, to compete in Miss America Strong pageant in Las Vegas

On Thursday, November 18, 2021, Southcoast native Ashley Bendiksen will compete for the title of Miss for America Strong at the Westgate Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, NV. The competition is the "Miss" division within the Mrs. America Organization, engaging single women of all ages who represent diverse personal, professional, and community achievements. Bendiksen will compete in a private interview with a panel of judges, swimsuit, evening wear, and an on-stage question to which she will demonstrate her readiness to take on the role of Miss for America Strong.

Bendiksen is originally from the Southcoast and held the title of Miss New Bedford in 2009. Her involvement in the community has been significant, serving on the boards of directors for the YWCA of Southeastern Massachusetts, New Bedford Festival Theatre, and the Miss New Bedford Scholarship Organization. She is also the previous founder of One Theater Group in Fairhaven, and was the Chairperson of the Southeastern Massachusetts Walk to End Alzheimer's and the annual New Bedford Fitness Challenge. Additionally, she has worked extensively with the New Bedford Women's Center, the Boys and Girls Club, the New Bedford Wellness Initiative, and the city's annual Love Your Heart Day. She was previously employed by the Bristol County District Attorney.

Bendiksen was first crowned Miss Rhode Island for America Strong on September 12, 2021, at the Providence Marriott Downtown in Providence, RI. The state competition is produced by director Tracy Brank of TCB Pageants. Now, Bendiksen will

compete against titleholders from every U.S. state.

Bendiksen is a nationally acclaimed speaker, Top Youth Speaker®, award-winning activist, author, and expert in domestic and sexual violence prevention and youth mental health. Year-round, she travels the U.S. to speak to students and educators, plus trains workplaces and first responders prevention and response. She is also the Founder of the Blue Hearts Project – a global storytelling platform for survivors. Bendiksen graduated as Valedictorian at Salve Regina University in Newport, RI with a B.A. in Administration of Justice – remarkably, seven years after once dropping out due to abuse. She is now a Newport resident, serving on the Board of Directors of the Women’s Resource Center of Newport County and is a volunteer nonprofit spotlight writer for Newport Neighbors Magazine.

With hopes of winning the national competition, Ashley aims to utilize the title and platform to serve on an even greater scale. She will continue her work to eradicate gender-based violence and empower women, girls, and youth. Additionally, she will serve as an advocate for Victoria’s Voice Foundation (VVF), the organization’s national charity, to help combat opioid abuse.

To watch the live stream of the competition, visit www.mrsamerica.com for more information.