

Senior Spotlight

Pageant winner aims to 'save the Earth'

Faran Fagen
Special Correspondent

ME. DePalma is most excited about winning the Ideal Ms. Florida Senior Pageant so she can extend her mission: "Pay it forward and save the Earth."

DePalma, 70, of Wilton Manors, has worked as a model, industrial consultant, private investigator and headed companies in design, marketing and manufacturing, but she also is dedicated to philanthropy.

DePalma is a member of the Broward County NatureScape board and is a National Wildlife Steward. She is a two-time winner of the Emerald Award, Broward County's highest environmental honor, for her work in the community and for her garden.

"It's my turn to tell younger people to serve our community," DePalma said. "That's what I want to take into nationals."

Contestants compete at the city and state level, with state royalty advancing to the National Ideal Ms. Senior Pageant, staged in July in Minnesota. The contest includes formal wear, sportswear and interview segments.

"I'm not a pageant person, but I was glad to represent senior women," DePalma said.

DePalma said she learned many of her varied skills from seniors, and she hopes to act as a mentor to young ladies. "Senior women planted seeds in me, so now it's time to repay them," she said.

DePalma's platform was cultivated long before her pageant victory and resonates in Wilton Manors, where she's lived since 1992.

In partnership with NatureScape, a Broward environmental agency, DePalma spearheaded the process to certify Wilton Manors as a national Community Wildlife Habitat. Wilton Manors became the 17th city to earn that distinction.



'PAY IT FORWARD'
M.E. DePalma of Wilton Manors was crowned Ideal Ms. Florida Senior. SUBMITTED PHOTO

DePalma continues to sit on the Wilton Manors NatureScape Committee to monitor progress and to retain certification. For the past six years, she has produced free classes for the city's parks department, culminating in a plant-cutting party at her home.

"For the past 10 years, she's been an extraordinary promoter of the NatureScape philosophy," said Diana Guidry, NatureScape Broward's outreach coordinator. "She just keeps going... She goes after things with all her heart and makes it happen."

To show its appreciation, Wilton Manors named a wildflower park after DePalma. She co-authored the book "A Garden Diary: A Guide to Gardening in South Florida" and created a backyard wildlife habitat with national and state recognition.

Despite the many accolades, DePalma deflects attention from herself. "It's not about me; it's about my passion," she said. "It's an opportunity to teach what I feel is most important in life. It's all about saving the Earth."