

Hampton Beach Talent Competition – Let the Stars Shine Bright by Bridgette Springer

This weekend residents and visitors to the Seacoast will have the chance to showcase their vocal abilities at the annual Hampton Beach Talent Competition on Fri., Aug. 26 – Sun., Aug. 28. Sponsored by Seashell Entertainment on behalf of the Hampton Beach Village District, the event is open to amateurs only and will give rising stars the opportunity to demonstrate their singing power on a local level while also providing all who enter the contest a chance to win prizes for first, second, and third honors.

The three day contest will consist of two groups which include individuals under the age of 18, and those ages 18 and over. As for the schedule, the Hampton Beach area follows a nightly formula of entertainment from 7 to 8 p.m. and again from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m. The talent show will fill in those time slots Friday through Sunday to accommodate all the performers. According to Glen French, entertainment coordinator for the beach, and talent show producer, the junior group will perform on Friday night, with ten finalists going on to perform on Sunday evening at 7 p.m. On Saturday evening, the senior group will perform, and the 10 semi-finalists will also perform at Sunday, this time at 8:30 p.m.

The Hampton Beach Talent Show has been an honored tradition for the last seven years and was called the Hampton Beach Idol competition until last year when it was discovered the “Idol” was a registered trademark by the “other” well known vocal talent contest with its famous singing judges. But that hasn’t stopped the show from moving forward under its updated name. As for the details, “We only accept competitors who will be singing, as we just haven’t evolved enough to incorporate additional talent,” French said. And while this is the seventh year for the show to grace the beach stage, “Hampton Beach has been sponsoring talent competitions in general for over a half of a century,” said French.

What can the performers expect this weekend? Audition tapes have already been sent in at this point, with a deadline of August 4, in order for program organizers to review the applications. According to French, they receive upwards of 75 submissions, but can only take about 22 performances on Friday and Saturday evenings with Sunday reserved for the finals. “I’m stunned at the quality of some of the audition tapes,” French said, which indicates the strength of contestants who will be singing on stage this weekend. Friday night will kick off with French as master of ceremonies. He encourages all performers to arrive early so they are familiar with the night’s schedule, and dressing rooms are available to contestants. A professional sound company will accept music from the contestants (no vocals) and will scan the compositions into a computer so they are ready to play along with the line-up.

When it gets to the finals on Sunday, “We ask entrants to perform a different song so we can assess their musical ability,” said French. In preparation for going on stage, Co-host Angela West who has a musical background, will spend time with the contestants and according to French gives them positive encouragement to get the evening flowing smoothly. “The audience support is stellar, they are always good to the contestants,” French said. Judging will be handled by a panel of professionals which include: Maureen Buckley, a precinct commissioner, Kathy Pepin a former precinct member who has been grading the singer’s since the competitions start seven years ago, and Julie Leonard, a Chicopee school teacher and Manager of the Hampton Beach Information Center. Sunday night will bring celebrity guest judge Robert Spitaleri with the group, “The Reminisants” As for scoring, performers will be evaluated based on vocal ability, stage presence, audience response, and overall entertainment value.

Audience members will find the show at the temporary beach stage, as the Seashell stage is still under construction. The programs have been printed which list all the competitors, their song, and where they are from. When asked about rain, “The show must go on,” French laughingly said. To accommodate spectators, which he estimates to be a crowd of about 300 – 500 people strong, there will be the added protection of a covered tent for the audience. Most importantly the event is free, which allows anyone to attend and cheer on the contestants.

The winners will bring home the following prizes: \$200 for third place, \$300 for second place, and \$500 for first place in both age groups. Jack Knox, lead singer of, “The Continentals,” created the talent competition, but passed away about a year a half ago according to French. “This is his creation and legacy and we carry it on in his memory.”