

CROWNING AROUND



Photos by Ernest A. Brown

2018 Cherry Blossom Princess Michelle Moreno-Silva, left, surprises 2024 Princess Alexandria Evers with a bouquet of fresh flowers during this year's Rhode Island Cherry Blossom Princess Crowning Ceremony at Shark's Event Center in Central Falls Wednesday morning. Looking on from left, are Cumberland Mayor Jeffrey Mutter, emcee Steve Aveson and Governor Dan McKee.

Cumberland native crowned RI Cherry Blossom Princess 2024

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CENTRAL FALLS – Cumberland native Alexandria Evers will represent Rhode Island in Washington D.C. next month as this year's Cherry Blossom Princess after being crowned on Wednesday.

"I'm deeply honored to be representing Rhode Island on the national stage," Evers said. "Washington D.C. and the cherry blossoms mean a great deal to me, especially what they represent."

Each year, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, in partnership with the State Society of Rhode Island, selects a young woman with outstanding academic and leadership achievements to join delegates from the other U.S. states and territories during the Cherry Blossom Festival in D.C.

The festival celebrates the lasting friendship between Japan and the U.S. and commemorates the 1912 gift of 3,000 cherry trees from Tokyo Mayor Yukio Ozaki. For one week, the cherry blossom princess delegates follow a packed schedule meeting with dignitaries and members of Congress and performing community service.

"This is such a special program," said 2018 Cherry Blossom Princess Michelle Moreno-Silva, who now works as the communications director for Treasury Secretary James Diouss. "Most of the women that are princesses, they all share the



Alexandria Evers, of Cumberland, smiles after being crowned the 2024 Rhode Island Cherry Blossom Princess Delegate during a ceremony at Shark's Event Center in Central Falls Wednesday morning.

common thing of wanting to serve their community."

Gov. Daniel McKee expressed his pride at crowning a fellow Cumberland native this year.

"It's great to be here in the Blackstone Valley," he said. "If you're from Rhode Island, you get a thumbs-up. If you're from Cumber-

land, you get two thumbs up. Alexandria, you have made your friends and family in the state very proud."

Evers graduated from the University of Rhode Island in 2021 with a degrees in political science and health studies, as well as

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Princess

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experience serving on the Student Senate, where she represented over 14,000 students and managed a \$3 million budget for student activities, according to public documents she submitted to the Cumberland Town Council. Evers told The Call & Times that her experience on the Student Senate was one of the most challenging yet rewarding leadership roles she's taken on.

She's also been active in Cumberland, where she said she's lived all her life. Since 2020, she's served on the Parks and Recreation Commission and in 2022, she ran for a vacant seat on the Cumberland School Committee. She currently runs a freelance social media management business, but said she's hoping to pivot into health policy, the intersection of her two degrees and the topic of her college thesis.

In D.C., Evers said she's excited for the opportunity to meet the other delegates and sit down with members of Congress during a scheduled meeting.

"I'm looking forward to getting to meet all the other women who are of similar caliber," she said.



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Cumberland Mayor Jeffrey Mutter, Taipei Economic and Cultural Office Director General Charles Liao, Consul General of Japan Kotaro Suzuki, and Blackstone Valley Tourism Council President Bob Billington, from left, applaud during the 2024 Rhode Island Cherry Blossom Princess Crowning Ceremony Wednesday.

Rhode Island has sent a Cherry Blossom Princess to D.C. every year since 2012. The Blackstone Valley received its first cherry trees, planted along Roosevelt Avenue in Pawtucket, in 2009 through a partnership with the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, the Pawtucket Foundation and TAI-O Group Real Estate Development Corp.

Blackstone Valley Tourism Council President Bob Billington said the council tried to get a festival started but it didn't take off. It wasn't until Sen. Jack Reed

asked about a cherry blossom princess to send to the 100th anniversary of the 1912 gift that the program began to flourish and attract qualified candidates.

Kotaro Suzuki, consul general of Japan, said the trees are a symbol of the "unshakable alliance" between the U.S. and Japan, and that he hopes Evers will "convey to Washington" the "spirit and aspirations" of Rhode Island.

In addition to their diplomatic symbolism, the trees traditionally represent the fragility and beauty of life

because of the short time-frame of their full bloom.

"We are reminded of their beauty, but most of all, we're reminded of their resilience," Diossa said of the blossoms.

The National Park Service announced that the cherry trees in D.C. reached their peak bloom on March 17 this year, but the 200-plus trees in Pawtucket, Central Falls and Woonsocket will bloom in late April and May.

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