

Rain doesn't deter Friday's 125th opening ceremonies

■ Merciers have time of life at Imperial's 125th. PAGE 16.

Hundreds attend events throughout Fourth of July weekend

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While rain dampened some of Friday's opening events, the enthusiasm remained high as Imperial celebrated its 125th anniversary last weekend.

Scheduled on the nation's most historic Fourth of July holiday weekend, Imperial's history was in the spotlight as people visited displays and took part in events many of Imperial's forefathers likely enjoyed 125 years earlier.

Commenting on Friday's downpour that sent the cake decorating contest indoors, Imperial Mayor Annie Longan noted how everyone adapted.

Probably a lot like Imperial's founders and first residents were forced to adapt to a spot in the prairie they called their new home.

And, 125 years after its founding in 1885, Mayor Longan said, "We're still here."

In her visits to other communities and for out-of-town meetings, Mayor Longan noted that Imperial is known as a "model town" for its progressiveness.

As she spoke, the mayor pointed out the welcome flag that hung on the podium, an important piece of history to Imperial residents.

Flags, including that one, hung along Imperial's streets in the mid-1940s as local veterans returned home from WWII.

After the posting of colors by Imperial's VFW 4688 Color Guard and Pledge of Allegiance, Mayor Longan introduced Mark Mercier Jr., and his wife, Sherie, who attended the 125th celebration weekend from Spring Valley, Ariz.

Mark's great grandfather, Thomas Mercier, was Imperial's co-founder in 1885 with Melville Goodrich.

Mrs. Mercier noted they first learned about Mark's family's tie to Imperial when a granddaughter of Mark's uncle, Bob Mercier of Lincoln, did a genealogy search for a paper.

Bob and Marilyn Mercier then came to Imperial in 1994, and spread the word among their family about this community in southwest Nebraska.

That led Mark Jr., and Sherie to change their wedding plans, and instead, get married in Imperial on June 29, 1995.



They arrived last week for the festivities on Tuesday, June 29, and were able to celebrate their 15th anniversary here.

With only a few days in town, Sherie remarked, "The hospitality here is great!"

She added, "As I understand it, Thomas and Mary Jane (Mercier) did a lot here. We are glad to be part of the heritage."

Miss Nebraska special guest

Imperial's opening ceremonies had another special guest, Miss Nebraska Teresa Scanlan of Gering.

While Imperial was celebrating its 125th birthday, she noted her age on the other spectrum.

She commented, "Age is just a number. Maturity and intelligence are really the only things that differentiate one from the other."

Crowned just a month ago, 17-year-old Scanlan said there have been a lot of headlines about her age. She is the youngest woman ever to wear the Miss Nebraska crown.

Up until then, she said she hadn't thought twice about her age.

"Throughout my life, I had never let my lack of years on the earth hold me back in anything," she said.

All the media attention that focused on her age bothered her a bit, but then she realized that it could be a great tool.

"I quickly decided to make the most of my situation and determined to spread hope and inspiration to all youth-doubters," she said.

Saying she always has been a resolute "teenitarian (one who believes in the power of teenagers), she plans to dedicate her year as Miss Nebraska to encourage those who fall to passiveness when it comes to the behavior of America's youth.

She said she plans to fight against the attitudes about youth that say "Kids will be kids" or "Sow your wild oats while you can."

She said those are unacceptable. Youths should strive to do all they can while they are young, rather than wait until "they grow up."

She encouraged the young people in the audience not to let anyone think less



Mark Jr. and Sherie Mercier of Spring Valley, Ariz., addressed the crowd Friday night, commenting on the community's hospitality and how glad they were to be in Imperial representing the Mercier family. (Republican photo)



Kayla Schilke, left, and Macy Coleman were in the big crowd of youths who enjoyed the turtle races. (Republican photo)



Miss Nebraska Teresa Scanlan sings the National Anthem at the opening ceremonies of Imperial's 125th birthday celebration Friday night. (Republican photo)

of them because of their age.

"Show that you are truly living your life to the fullest and becoming an inspiration to others," she said.

Scanlan was home-schooled most of her years as a student, and graduated from Scottsbluff High School this May.

She hopes to attend law school, become a lawyer and end her career as a U.S. President or Supreme Court Judge.

After her talk, she performed "White-water Chopsticks," which was her talent competition at the pageant.

She also sang the National Anthem earlier in the program. Many people received autographs from her, as well.

She will represent Nebraska in the Miss America Pageant on Jan. 15, 2011.

Despite having to move the cake decorating indoors, the crowd was able to return outside for the opening ceremonies under the tent.

According to reports from chairmen of the various events all weekend, hundreds took part in Saturday's full schedule.

See inside for more coverage on those events.