

A Beautiful Mind

JOLEEN IWANIEC WOULD LOVE TO BE THE first Miss America on the moon. The WCC student and winner of the Miss Congeniality distinction in the 2009 Miss Hawai'i pageant didn't know that building rockets would become a passion until she met astronomy professor Joe Ciotti and coordinator of the NASA Flight Training AEL Jake Hudson. Now, she's propelled herself in a new direction toward a degree in electrical engineering.

"Every semester is another step toward graduating in 2012," says Iwaniec. "My ultimate goal is to work with NASA."

Iwaniec recently participated in The NASA University Student Launch Initiative, or USLI, a competition that challenges university-level students to design, build and fly a reusable rocket with scientific payload to one mile in altitude. The project engages students in scientific research and real-world engineering processes with NASA engineers.

"She has a self-drive that's incredible," said Ciotti. USLI was just the first step. On September 16,



Joleen Iwaniec, WCC student rocket designer

Iwaniec traveled with a team of students to Nevada to launch a rocket that she affectionately calls "Miss Kaena", two miles up in the sky.

And this year, she's going to compete again in the Miss Hawai'i pageant with a platform of science education, specifically KITS, or Kids in Technology and Sciences.

"My goal is to develop a program to take to schools to show young students that there's nothing to be afraid of in the STEM programs — you know, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics," said Iwaniec. "I just have such a passion for learning and for outreach to kids who think science is scary instead of interesting."

She says 65% of NASA employees today are nearing retirement and there's a need to be discussing with young people what types of career paths will become available to them, so they can step into those roles.

Iwaniec has the chance to win \$35,000 in college scholarships in the 2010 Miss Hawai'i pageant, with a preliminary competition coming up on October 3 at Leeward Community College. She hopes to win and use the money to fund her education.

Joe Ciotti says Iwaniec glows with the positive. "When you have a positive attitude, it opens up so many doors."

For Joleen Iwaniec, it's clear that anything is possible, maybe even a trip to the moon in a sparkling blue gown. ■