

GET REAL

BY KERRY SPECKMAN



**First Coasters find their
15 minutes of fame.
And, in some cases,
a whole lot more.**

Whitney Thompson had no intention of auditioning for *America's Next Top Model*.

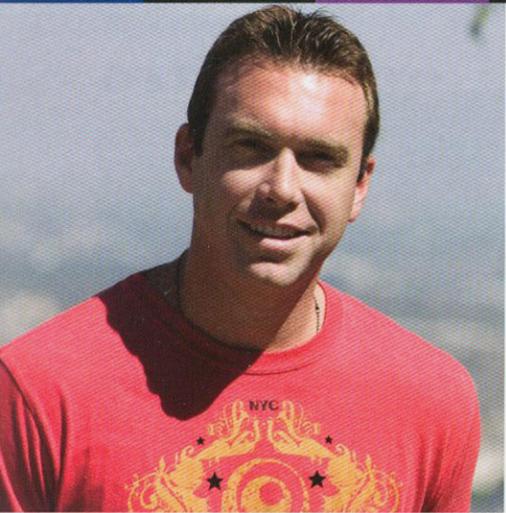
In fact, she was seriously considering quitting modeling altogether until a chance encounter at a California airport.

She was buying a candy bar at LAX when she was approached by a scout for the show and encouraged to audition. Thompson (left), took the woman's advice and went to an audition in Orlando but didn't really expect anything to come of it.

After being selected for the show, the 20-year-old model (who has appeared on the cover of *Jacksonville Magazine* three times) didn't think she had a chance of winning. Even as she stood on the runway as one of the final two contestants, she never thought she'd be named "America's Next Top Model." And when Tyra Banks finally *did* announce her as the winner, she couldn't comprehend what had happened.

"I was in shock, total utter shock. I didn't believe it. I thought someone was playing a joke on me," Thompson recalls, though if she still has doubts, she need only refer to her *Seventeen* magazine cover, Cover Girl billboard in New York's Times Square or exclusive photo shoot in next month's edition of *Jacksonville Magazine*.

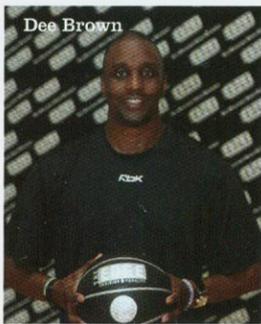
The Atlantic Beach native has garnered a lot of press since the show's finale in May, but she's certainly not the first local resident to make a name for herself on reality TV. Northeast Florida is fertile ground for unscripted TV "talent."



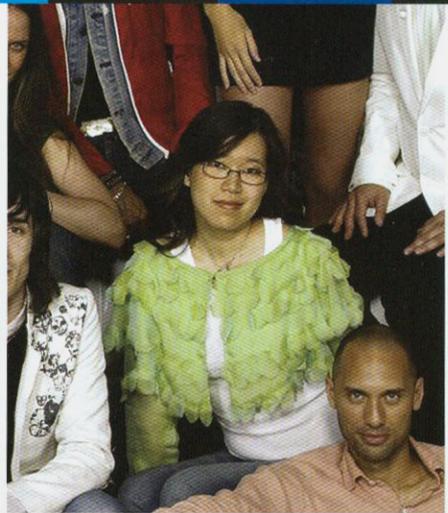
Alex Boylan



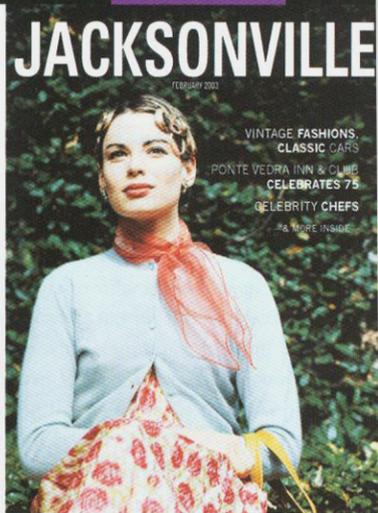
Evelyn Estes



Dee Brown



Diana Eng



Yoanna House

JACKSONVILLE
FEBRUARY 2003
VINTAGE FASHIONS,
CLASSIC CARS
PONTE VEDRA INN & CLUB
CELEBRATES 75
CELEBRITY CHEFS
#A MORE INSIDE

Alex Boylan

The Amazing Race (CBS)

When Boylan auditioned for *The Amazing Race II* in 2001, it was more about getting to travel the world for free than becoming a reality TV star. Turns out, Boylan, who graduated from Jacksonville University with a degree in international business, found fame anyway (and a new career) after winning the race with a childhood friend.

Where is he now? Boylan moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career in entertainment. His most recent project, an interactive travel reality series called *Around the World for Free*, took him on a 45,000-mile journey to 16 countries in 159 days without spending one penny.

Evelyn Estes

Extreme Makeover (ABC)

A single mom with three kids, Estes didn't have much time to worry about her appearance. Fortunately (or unfortunately, depending on how you look at it), her 11-year-old daughter applied to *Extreme Makeover* on her behalf in 2003. As part of Evelyn's makeover, she received a tummy tuck, breast implants, liposuction on her thighs and porcelain veneers.

Where is she now? Who knows? Nobody recognizes her anymore.

Dee Brown

Dream Job (ESPN)

He played 12 seasons in the NBA with the Boston Celtics, Toronto Raptors and Orlando Magic and won the NBA Slam Dunk Contest in 1991, so Brown didn't need attention. But his competitive side eventually took over, and he agreed to do battle with five other retired cagers for a one-year NBA analyst contract with ESPN. Upon being named winner in 2005, Brown did a cartwheel (almost kicking Stuart Scott's teeth out in the process) and went on to host *City Slam* for two seasons.

Where is he now? Brown, who was recently inducted into JU's Athletic Hall of Fame, lives in Orlando, where he owns and operates the EDGE Basketball Training Facility and hosts

Full Court Press daily on Sirius Satellite Radio. He also owns The Beacon restaurant and Stardust Lounge in the Orlando area.

Diana Eng

Project Runway (BRAVO)

Like Heidi Klum says, "In fashion, one day you are in. The next day you're out." For Eng, who graduated from Stanton, the "next day" came in episode six of season two. During casting, the self-proclaimed "fashion nerd" intrigued Klum and Co. with technology-inspired garments like an inflatable dress and heartbeat hoodie; but in the end, her geek chic designs proved not to be all that smart.

Where is she now? Eng has found the perfect right brain/left brain job: working in research and development at Victoria's Secret creating new technology for bras and is writing two books on fashion and technology.

Yoanna House

America's Next Top Model (CW)

House had always been interested in fashion, but it wasn't until she lost 50 pounds that she was inspired to pursue modeling as a career. (Editorial note: We'd like to think that appearing on the February 2003 *Jacksonville Magazine* cover had something to do with it, too.) Her lack of experience on the runway and in front of the camera landed her in the bottom two on more than one occasion, but once she hit her stride, nothing could stop her from becoming the second winner of *America's Next Top Model*.

Where is she now? She continues to model and has hosted *The Look for Less* on the Style Network. This summer she will host a new reality series, *Queen Bees*, on The N.

Grandma Lee

Last Comic Standing (NBC)

"One morning my grandson put army men in my coffee cup. I asked him why and he said, 'Because the best part of waking up is soldiers in your cup.'"

With jokes like that, it's no wonder 75-year-

old Grandma Lee didn't make it past the first round of auditions. Nevertheless, she was one of a handful of also-rans chosen to perform during the finale of *Last Comic Standing 2* in 2004.

Where is she now? As proof of her motto, "Not Ready for the Rocking Chair," Grandma Lee performs at comedy clubs across the country (catch her next month at Jeremiah Bullfrog's in Topeka!) and The Comedy Zone in Mandarin.

Julie Hadden

The Biggest Loser (NBC)

Former beauty pageant contestant Julie Hadden had all but given up losing weight when she decided to audition for season four of *The Biggest Loser*. By the time the show wrapped in late 2007, Julie had lost 97 pounds (or 44.5 percent of her total body weight), the third most of any woman in the history of the show, and she was named runner-up.

Where is she now? As a stay-at-home mom, Julie spends most of her time caring for her sons Noah and Jaxon, but she also makes personal appearances and has been asked to speak before Congress on fitness and nutrition.

Midget Mac

I Love New York (VH1)

Tiffany "New York" Pollard didn't fall in love with Midget Mac (né Torrey Samuels) on the second season of her *waaaay* over-the-top dating show, but the rest of America did. The four-foot-tall single father and "hype man" for Young Cash overshadowed the other contestants with his personality, sincerity and positivity. Mac made a big impression on New York during a swimming competition, yet it wasn't enough to keep him afloat to episode six.

Where is he now? When he's not hosting VIP parties in Las Vegas or working on a new CD, Mac, who now has a booking agent, publicist and fan club, is fighting off the ladies.

Phil Stacey

American Idol (FOX)

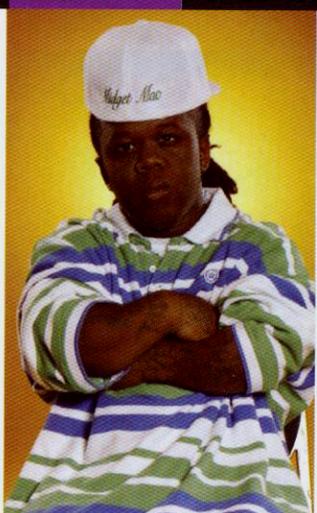
Early in the competition, Stacey was better



Grandma Lee



Julie Hadden



Midget Mac



Phil Stacey



Ashlee Williss

known as the guy who missed his daughter's birth to audition than a talented singer who had a chance of going very far. Surprising many fans of the show (and probably himself), the father of two and petty officer third class in the U.S. Navy made it to the top 12, finishing sixth.

Where is he now? After completing his commitment to the Navy, Stacey received an honorable discharge then re-enlisted with the Naval Reserves. He and his family have since moved to Nashville where he signed with Lyric Street Records. "If You Didn't Love Me," the first single off his debut album, reached No. 28 on Billboard's Hot Country Chart earlier this year.

Ashlee Williss

The Bachelor (ABC)

Originally from Jacksonville Beach, Williss didn't win the heart of Englishman Matt Grant on the 12th season of *The Bachelor*. The Los Angeles transplant did, however, find inspiration for her latest song, "Waste My Time." As the first bachelorette to snog Matt (that's British slang for make-out), Williss looked like she'd be around for a while, though she didn't make it past the fourth rose ceremony.

Where is she now? Since appearing on the show, Williss has gotten lots of publicity—some good ("Waste My Time" has gotten nearly 12,000 plays on her MySpace page) and some not (VH1's *Best Week Ever* and *The Soup* on E! poked fun at her weepy exit). Read more about Ashlee Williss in next month's edition of *Jacksonville Magazine*.

Mike Lambert

Real World: Miami (MTV)

Compared to his colorful roommates, Lambert, who grew up in Atlantic Beach, blended into the woodwork for the better part of the fifth season. That is, until the infamous shower episode. Having appeared on the *Real World's* fifth season, which debuted back in 1996, and the *Real World/Road Rules Challenge* in 2000, he's also Northeast Florida's original reality TV star.

Where is he now? Lambert took the route of many of his MTV reality show counterparts and

headed west. He appeared in the MTV mockumentary *The Wedding Video* in 2003.

Brittany Wescott & Corliss Smith

American Idol (FOX)

In 2007, these full-figured songstresses scored plus-sized airtime for their jazzy vocals and bigger-than-life personalities (in the judging room, Brittany referred to host Ryan Seacrest as "the love of my life," while Corliss said she preferred "beefy" men like judge Randy Jackson). The best friends made it through to Hollywood but, alas, their journey ended there.

Where are they now? Despite winning rave reviews from *Entertainment Weekly*, *Rolling Stone* and MTV for their appearance, Wescott and Smith have not yet landed a recording contract, their own reality show or even a key to the city of Jacksonville.

Kim Alexis

But Can They Sing? (VH1)

The local supermodel traded magazine covers (she's appeared on more than 500 over the course of her 30-year career) for song covers in this 2005 "celeb-reality" singing competition. Alexis competed against eight other famous folks who had never sung in public before, including boxer Larry Holmes and actress Morgan Fairchild, and was ousted in the second week.

Where is she now? Alexis hosts *She's Got the Look*, a original series now showing on TV Land that gives women 35 and older a second chance at a modeling career. She lives in Ponte Vedra Beach with her husband Ron Dugay and five sons.

The Harvey Family

Extreme Makeover: Home Edition (ABC)

"Good morning, Harvey Family!"

Ty Pennington's familiar bullhorn greeting awakened the Harveys at their home in Hastings back in 2005. The family of seven, living in a two-bedroom house infested with termites and mold, had fallen on hard times after

Willie was diagnosed with adult epilepsy and could no longer work as a mechanic. The *Extreme* team tore the house down to its foundation and spent the next 96 hours straight building the Harveys' 4,289-foot dream home.

Where is he now? According to the St. Johns County Property Appraiser's Office website, the Harveys still own the home on East Street, now valued at more than \$350,000.

But Wait!

There's more...

They may not be as well known, but these local reality TV contestants deserve another 15 seconds of fame: Orange Park's **Gavin Slabbert** and Ponte Vedra Beach's **Gerry James** competed on the Golf Channel's *The Big Break VI: Trump National* and *The Big Break: Mesquite* respectively... **Sheryl Braxton** of Ponte Vedra Beach was the first houseguest evicted on CBS' *Big Brother 2*... **Crowned: The Mother of All Pageants**, a mother-and-daughter beauty pageant on the CW, showcased three Northeast Floridians, **Angela and Tenia** from Orange Park and **Patty** from Jacksonville... **Lafayette "Yours" Brown** was eliminated on the second episode of VH1's *I Love New York 2*... Music mogul P. Diddy auditioned members for an "all-male super group," including Jacksonville's **Brian Harris**, on MTV's *Making the Band 4*... Miss Jacksonville 2001 **Alju' Jackson** vied for the chance to perform with T-Boz and Chilli of the Grammy-winning group TLC on the UPN show *R U the Girl*... **Derek McCray** started out on *The Pit Crew* on the 14th season of MTV's *Road Rules* but ended up a winner... Life was a beach for Atlantic Beach's **Molli Miller** who finished second in the short board division of MTV's *Surf Girls*... Pro wrestler wanna-be **Hawk Younkings** fought his way through *Tough Enough* on MTV... **Sherri Crews** surprised her husband Marshall by inviting TLC's *While You Were Out* to redo their innkeeper's quarters at Casa de la Paz, a B&B in St. Augustine... ABC's *Wife Swap* sent **Lisa Haggerty** to Ohio to live with a family who lives as if they are in medieval times. *J