

## **Kára McCullough** **Miss USA 2017**

Kára McCullough was born in Naples, Italy, but raised in Virginia Beach for the majority of her childhood. Her mother's position as Chief Petty Officer in the United States Navy (she is now retired) exposed Kára to many different cultures and places at a young age, including Sicily, Japan, South Korea and Hawaii.

For as long as she can remember, Kára has been fascinated with science and the impact it has on our everyday lives. One of her earliest memories as a child was rummaging through a Naval base tower's basement in Japan, where she came across a science kit that had been discarded. Her passion for science grew from there, leading her to earn her Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry with a concentration in Radiochemistry from South Carolina State University. Her major provided her opportunities to intern at many universities, which paved the way to her current career as a scientist for the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Kára is the founder of a self-funded community outreach program called "Science Exploration for Kids" (SE4K), which creates interactive activities celebrating math and science to cultivate a passion for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) among children. As Miss USA, Kára has expanded her program throughout the country and continues to advocate for today's youth to enter STEM career fields. Kára teamed up with the New York City Department of Education to expand her STEM enrichment program inspiring students throughout the city's boroughs where she led discussions and hands on experiments to encourage kids to consider opportunities in science and to be supportive of their peers.

Kára continues to influence others to be persistent in their goals through speaking engagements and other opportunities where she is able to highlight her love for science. Most recently, Kára presented at the 2018 Breakthrough Prize Awards, an annual event that provides nearly \$200 million to top science and mathematics researchers and contributes to pioneers who have made advancements in their fields. Additionally, Kára hosted the first annual "Women in Power" event leading into the Chelsea Film Festival with the topic: "Women in Leadership Positions: How Did They Make it To the Top?"

Kára enjoys mentoring children not only in science, but also through her love of sports. A strong basketball player through middle and high school, Kára has coached an all-girls youth program in the greater D.C. area. Outside of her work in the community, Kára has a penchant for cooking specialty Italian and soul food cuisines inspired by her early travels. Kára's win marks the first time a contestant from the District of Columbia has won the title of Miss USA back-to-back. As part of winning Miss USA, Kára represented the United States at the 66<sup>th</sup> Miss Universe pageant where she competed among 91 women from around the world and placed in the Top 10.