

# THE LEADER-NEWS

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# Teaching Resiliency

Killdeer's Jaylynn Hicks earns 2026 Miss Rodeo ND with persistence, resiliency

BY RYAN SCHLEHUBER  
 BEULAH BEACON EDITOR

As a science teacher at Killdeer High School, Jaylynn Hicks is used to her students asking all kinds of questions. Lately though, it hasn't been about anything in textbooks, but rather about her new crown.

Hicks, 24, was recently officially crowned as the 2026 Miss Rodeo North Dakota, with the coronation taking place at the Killdeer Saddle Club building Jan. 3. She was crowned by 2025 Miss Rodeo North Dakota Claire Graner.

Hicks actually won the 2026 title last June, however, as tradition goes with the crown, she was a "lady-in-waiting" for the past six months. Thus, when she returned to school for her second year of teaching, students bombarded her with questions.

"My students have been great in their support," said Hicks, a 2020 Killdeer High School graduate. "They were excited for me last school year when I was competing, before I won. Coming back this fall, they had so many questions. I loved answering their questions."

Killdeer High School Principal Brady Wilz said having a teacher who is Miss Rodeo North Dakota is "extremely exciting" for the entire school district, however, he said Hicks has been humbling throughout the whole process.

"Although the title of Miss Rodeo ND comes with a significant amount of honor and spotlight, especially in a ranching and rodeo community, Jaylynn remains humble, going about her day as usual, educating the students of Killdeer High School," Wilz said. "Her title portrays a significant lesson to students, that being small town kids can achieve big time goals through perseverance, determination and the willingness to be the best version of yourself."

"As a school and a community, we are extremely proud of Jaylynn and her accomplishment of Miss Rodeo North Dakota," he added.



#### SUBMITTED PHOTOS | JAYLYNN HICKS

Claire Graner, right, 2025 Miss Rodeo North Dakota, crowns new Miss Rodeo North Dakota Jaylynn Hicks with a ceremonial cowboy hat during her coronation, which was held at the Killdeer Saddle Club building Jan. 3.

#### NEVER GIVING UP

One thing Hicks has shown her students is a show of resilience and persistence in obtaining a goal in life, as she competed for the title three times, twice against Graner (in 2023 and 2024), finally achieving it this year.

"The first year I ran, I was completely unprepared," Hicks said. "I had just won my first-ever rodeo queen pageant in Killdeer, so I was going out for it for the experience."

Not winning it that year, however, sparked a fire in her, so she worked hard to earn the title in her second try, but came up short again.

"I was too focused on winning and not remembering why I wanted to be rodeo queen," Hicks said. "This year, I was bringing myself back to why I wanted to run, and it taught me so many things – perseverance, humility and a confidence to pursue my dreams. This time, there was nothing holding me back."

To achieve the Miss Rodeo

North Dakota title, competitors must achieve high rankings in three of the pageant's categories – horsemanship, appearance and personality. The Miss Rodeo North Dakota pageant, which is for women ages 21 to 26, has been held every year since 1954, supporting their academic and professional development, allowing the women to travel the country promoting their communities, the Western lifestyle and economies and participating supporters.

Hicks is a two-time Miss Killdeer Mountain Roundup winner, which she took that title to the state pageant in 2022 and 2025.

"Wearing the sash of my hometown rodeo, that I've been a part of since I was a kid, was a great feeling that is nearly impossible to describe," she said. "On top of that winning the title of Miss Rodeo North Dakota while representing my hometown rodeo is a highlight of my life."

"I've always felt the support and love from the Killdeer Saddle Club that hosts the rodeo and the Dunn County community so it was a privilege to bring the state title back to Dunn County."

Hicks is only the second person from Dunn County to win the title, the first being Ellen Trotter, of Killdeer, who was the 1960 Miss Rodeo North Dakota.

Even though it was six

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Rodeo cont. on 5