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Minnesota State Fair butter sculpture tradition has dairy princesses bundling up in the summer



1 of 4 | Sculptor Gerry Kulzer carves the likeness of Malorie Thorson, this year's Princess Kay of the Milky Way, out of a block of butter at the Minnesota State Fair, Thursday, Aug. 21, 2025 in Falcon Heights, Minn. (AP Photo/Mark Vancleave)

BY MARK VANCELEAVE AND STEVE KARNOWSKI

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FALCON HEIGHTS, Minn. (AP) — It was a warm summer day but Malorie Thorson was dressed for winter as

Gerry Kulzer sculpted a likeness of her head from a large block of butter Thursday in keeping with a 60-year-old tradition on the opening day of the Minnesota State Fair.

Thorson, a 20-year-old from the town of Waverly, was crowned as the [72nd Princess Kay of the Milky Way](#) on Wednesday night. And her first official duty as the goodwill ambassador for the state's 1,800 dairy farm families was to bundle up and sit in a rotating glassed-in studio at 40 degrees F (4 Celsius) as fairgoers gathered to watch Kulzer turn a 90-pound (41-kilogram) block of salted butter into art.

Other state fairs also feature butter sculptures. The Iowa State Fair has been famous for its [life-sized Butter Cow](#) for over a century. A replica will be displayed at the Smithsonian Institution's Renwick Gallery in Washington starting Saturday. The 2025 New York State Fair butter sculpture, unveiled Tuesday, is a [900-pound \(410-kilogram\) nod](#) to the 125th anniversary of "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" by New York state native L. Frank Baum.

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But in Minnesota, [all 10 of the dairy princess finalists](#) get a likeness of their heads carved before an ever-changing live audience. Each one gets to take their sculpture home after the fair, along with a bucket of the scraps. They can deep-freeze their heads as souvenirs or share them with family and friends, maybe spreading some of the butter onto corn on the cob.

Wearing her tiara on her head, her sash over her overcoat and her gloves folded on her lap, Thorson said she loved the break from the nearly 80 degree (27 Celsius) heat outside.

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But she added it was an “unreal experience” to find herself at the center of attention because her mother had been taking her to the fair and its [dairy stands](#) since she was at least 3. She said her mother had been a Princess Kay finalist in 1996.

Thorson expressed confidence that Kulzer would do her justice.

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“I have so much faith in him. I usually don’t have as much faith in a lot of people because I like to be in control sometimes,” the South Dakota State University student said. “So it’s really nice to just sit back, relax and know that he’s going to do a great job.”

It’s Kulzer’s fourth year as the fair’s official butter sculptor. The artist, who usually sculpts with clay, said butter is different, that it’s harder, more like carving stone.

“The temperature makes a huge difference,” he said during a warm-up break. “If you are working at a 50-degree temperature, it’s just like clay. In the 40 degrees here, it’s just like from your refrigerator. So you cut a knife into your stick of butter, it’s like it’s hard and flaky.”

But Kulzer said his state fair gig is “super fun” even though it’s a little hard working in the cold.

“My fingers get a little stiff, and so I’ve got two layers on my hands. But you can’t layer up too much because you still need the dexterity to carve,” he said. “My fingers were cramping up because they were getting cold, so you take a break when you need it.”

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