

Heidi Hepler is ready to try for big runway



Heidi Hepler tries on her Miss Michigan crown and dreams of the possibility of wearing the official garb of Miss America.

By MARGARET MILLER

She was chosen by her contemporaries for a number of distinctions as she made her way through Livonia schools.

Heidi Hepler, now Miss Michigan, ticked them off.

"Best all-around girl, most spirited, frizziest hair."

That hair, thick, chestnut brown and not a bit frizzy except when it rains, stood Heidi in good stead when Miss Livonia became Miss Michigan at Muskegon earlier this summer.

"They have elastic on the crown and they pin it to your hair with bobby pins," she explained. "I don't know how they'd manage with someone with thin, fine hair."

And her high spirits and well-rounded view of life will be big pluses in Atlantic City the first week in September when Heidi goes for the big one — the chance to walk down the runway as Miss America.

LIVONIA IS GIVING a great sendoff to its beautiful representative, and she is determined to bring credit to the community to which she feels a big debt.

The local contestant, for her part, will be ready and willing on both occasions to greet old and new friends, sign autographs and show off some of the singing talent that made her Miss Michigan.

"I've grown up here and had all my training here, and it's been a good place for me and my brother and sister," she said.

"I think we've all taken advantage of the good things Livonia had to offer — the music programs in school, the clubs, the organizations like Livonia Youth Symphony."

And now, as she goes around the area in a series of appearances, she says she can fairly "feel the energy of the community."

"I feel I'm taking a little bit of everyone with me as I go to the Miss America competition," she added. "I really want to win for Livonia."

THE DAUGHTER of Darwyn and Judy Hepler has kept a fast pace since she won the Miss Michigan competition. Now 24, she will be one of the oldest of the state representatives who will compete at Atlantic City, and she figures all the experiences that have gone before and all she is doing now will be valuable in helping her get ready.

Now operating from an apartment in Birmingham — her first try at living on her own — she spends her days "performing and studying and waiting for Sept. 6."

As Miss Michigan she has widened the scope of the activities she enjoyed since being chosen Miss Livonia more than a year ago.

There have been opera theater appearances with her friend Brett Martin, a tenor from Troy who likes to sing the old romantic songs as much as Heidi does.

There have been appearances to promote cherries at Traverse City and blueberries at South Haven and log-rolling at Mio, the latter replete with mosquitos but memorable because of the little chair carved for her by one of the lumberjacks.

Heidi also has been on hand for shopping mall events like a banana-split eat-in and an appearance by presidential candidate Winnie the Pooh.

And she has been stepping up her voice lessons with Marjorie Gordon, who coached her winning singing performance in the talent portion of the Miss Michigan contest in Muskegon. She sang Victor Herbert's "Italian Street Song."

COMPETING for the Miss America crown and all that goes with it is described by Judy Hepler as the perfect opportunity for her daughter.

"She has the talent and she loves to reach people," Miss Michigan's mother said. "The Miss America pageant is the perfect place to reach out, especially to young people, to encourage them to do all they can. It's the perfect place to love the country and the people."

Heidi said she already has been doing that kind of reaching out, especially when appearing as a guest at local pageants.

And she feels that all the things she has done up to now have had their place in preparing her for the big moment coming up.

There was the chance to lead by being president of the student council at Jefferson School, and there was cheerleading at Frost Junior High and Bentley High School.

There was participation in choral groups all the way through school. And then at the end of high school there was the rare opportunity to participate in the American Field Service program.

Heidi spent a year with a family in Australia. As an exchange student, she gained experience meeting people and speaking before groups. And, because her host family immigrated to Australia from Italy, she gained there her first love and appreciation of opera.

BACK IN LIVONIA she enrolled as a pre-veterinary student at Schoolcraft College — "at that point I didn't take my singing seriously," she explained.

But she checked opera records out of the Schoolcraft library and found herself thinking music more and more.

Finally she realized singing was what she wanted to do. Voice study followed and then a summer at Interlochen National Music Camp opera theater, and study of music and Italian at Wayne State University.

She appeared with the Piccolo Opera Company, The Michigan Opera Theater and the comic Opera Guild of Ann Arbor. She won a vocal scholarship from the Music Study Club of Metropolitan Detroit.



Heidi shows her sister Holly (left) how criss-crossed elastic bands hold the tiny crown atop the beauty queen's head. (Staff photos by Art Emanuele)



Tenor Brett Martin of Troy joins Heidi in a practice duet. "Our voice blend well and he's great to work with," she says.

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