

Ramona Ford

Mother of 6
vies for
title of
Mrs. Michigan

By LORRAINE MCCLISH

A Farmington Hills woman who says that age is no more than just a number, is a promoter as well as a contestant in this year's Mrs. Michigan-America Pageant.

"I'm 48. That's no secret. I'm not worried about competing with those who are younger than I am. I've got a lot of experience behind me they don't have," said Ramona Ford.

The mother of six children who works as a cosmetologist in Heidi's West Bloomfield Salon has no trouble getting sponsors for her entry into the

pageant. And she expects to have a good-sized cheering section in the audience for her appearances during the three days of hoopla planned for the contestants.

The Mrs. Michigan-America Pageant runs Wednesday through Friday, March 4-6 in Dearborn's Hyatt Regency Hotel and culminates with the crowning of Mrs. Michigan 1981 in Fairlane's center court.

The closing ceremony is without charge and open to the public.

OF THE SEVEN years Mrs. Ford has been working as a hair stylist in



"There is only one requirement for the Mrs. Michigan-America Pageant and that is that you are married. So all I can do is give it all I've got and that is what I'm going to do." (Staff photos by Randy Borst)

Orchard Mall, she says, "I never once had a chance to feel old. The people I work with are mostly younger than I am but they are like a second family to me. Every one of them has urged me to enter the contest.

"And," she adds, "I got an immediate when I asked Heidi if she would be a sponsor for me."

Co-workers have styled her hair. An appointment is already made for the exact day she will have it cut. Ed Rondina, a hair colorist in the salon, has added a red tint to her natural black hair. Polina Alexander and her daughter Nina, who own and operate a facial

salon in the mall, have designed her make-up.

"But that's not unusual," she said. "We're always working on one another at Heidi's. If we need a tint or a manicure on the job, we hear about it. Heidi is very meticulous. We don't wear uniforms on the job. We wear good clothes. She expects us to look good and we do."

On her own Mrs. Ford can be found at Farmington YMCA twice a week "going through the most vigorous physical fitness workouts they had to offer me there," she said. "And I'm feeling a lot better because of it."

HER APPEARANCE in the swim suit parade was the only facet of the pageant that gave her any qualms about entering the contest, which counts for up to 30 percent of the judges' points.

Another 30 points can be awarded for the contestant's appearance in an evening gown, which she will make with her husband, Glen.

The remainder of the points are awarded after private interviews with the judges.

Her on-stage appearances are not a concern for her, stemming back to her pre-marriage career as singer on local TV shows and a USO entertainer. She still sings now as a member of St. Columbian Catholic Church choir.

Mrs. Ford's mentor and inspiration throughout all the pre-planning that is necessary for entering the pageant is Mabel Arvo, a Novi resident and the reigning Mrs. Michigan, who has eased some of the fears concerning age.

Even so, Mrs. Ford has no idea how many contestants will be vying for the title or what their ages are.

Mrs. Arvo is 49. Mrs. Michigan for 1979, Cherie Perlmutter of Southfield, is in her mid-30s. And Mrs. Michigan for 1978 was Susan Reed Arning, who took the title only four years after she was named Miss Farmington in 1974.

"There is only one requirement for the Mrs. Michigan-America pageant," Mrs. Ford said, "and that is that you must be married. So, all I can do is give it all I've got and that is what I'm going to do."

MRS. FORD's sponsor, in addition to Heidi's Salons, are her three brothers, Al, Larry and Victor Yezbick, and the Exchange Club of Northwest Detroit.

Her cheering section will be led by her husband and the couple's children: Shelley and Cindy, both married; and four at home, Leslie, Bill, Kathy who attends North Farmington High School and Glen who attends O. E. Dunckel Middle School.

She has the full support of many relatives and friends as well as many of her regular clients in Heidi's.

"A lot of them even asked if they could vote for me," she said.

OCC boasts two beauty queens

Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge campus has two beauty queens among its student body these days — Mabel Arvo, the current Mrs. Michigan, and Cherie Perlmutter, who won the same title in 1979.

Both are advocates of the competition, and both are encouraging area women to take part in the 1981 "Mrs. Michigan" competition that will be staged from March 4-6 in Dearborn's Fairlane Town Center.

Mrs. Arvo, of Novi, says she will take personal calls from anyone who is interested in the competition at 553-0861. Or interested women may write to "Mrs. Michigan-America Pageant," P.O. Box 2134, Southfield, 48076.

MRS. ARVO, who is continuing her studies in liberal arts, serves as student senator and secretary for the campus and College Academic Senate. She has performed as an accomplished soloist with Rackham Choir of Detroit Symphony Chorus and Special Ensemble.

She was nominated in the Mrs. Michigan pageant by one of her five children, and her win extended an already busy schedule with mandatory appearances about the state as Mrs. Michigan.

Of the contest, she says, "Mrs. Michigan is different from most beauty contests, since contestants are judged on poise, personality, interests in the com-

munity and personal viewpoints.

"Although there is a swimsuit and evening gown competition, judges give the greatest emphasis to a short speech prepared by each contestant."

She found the national competition, held last year in Las Vegas, to be the most exciting part of her reign.

"I met people who were life-minded," she said, "and made many new friends."

CHERIE PERLMUTTER is a resident of Southfield who came to OCC to study data processing after attending Gaston College and Lenoir Rhyne College in North Carolina.

She operates a computer for her husband's business, and designs and makes children's clothing for "Privileged Children" in Southfield. She has successfully managed the outlet and now has sales in eight states.

A prime concern now is children's advertising. She carefully follows the legislature in their consideration of various bills to protect children from exploitation, and she urges citizens to participate in public hearings on this issue.

About her Mrs. Michigan title, she says her reign gave her the opportunity to show women in a positive light while she participated in numerous fundraisings for charity.



Cheri Perlmutter, at left, a Southfield woman who won the title of Mrs. Michigan last year, and Mabel Arvo, a Novi resident who gives up her Mrs. Michigan title this spring, encourage area women to join the next competition. The Mrs. Michigan-America Pageant will be staged in March in Dearborn.

Club Elite

For discount shoppers only

Story: SHIRLEE IDEN
Photos: MINDY SAUNDERS

Frugality hasn't gone out of style — particularly in the current inflated economy.

Richard Litwin says it this way: "There's nothing cheap about saving money."

The 23-year-old entrepreneur has set out to make it easy for people to save money and easy to save face as well. What he refers to is the current craze for discounts.

Though some may say people are no longer embarrassed about using a coupon, Litwin disagrees.

He contends people offering a coupon to get something knocked off the price of merchandise or services feel demeaned no matter what their circumstances.

The Litwin idea, one he considers universally acceptable, is to embellish on the fact we live in a plastic society anyway.

His Club Elite offers a simple plastic card for \$25, (currently even that is being discounted to \$16.55) which entitles the consumer to discounts averaging 17 percent at nearly 200 area businesses.

WITH THE MEMBERSHIP CARD comes a leather-like folder with infor-

mation on all the affiliated businesses and the discount offered. Their operation is headquartered in Southfield, but reaches to all of southeastern Michigan.

Litwin and his associate, Alan Gildenberg, contend Club Elite is a no-lose proposition for consumers and merchants.

"It's a way for consumers to save money without risking a cent, since they can rapidly get their membership fee out," said Gildenberg. "And what we're saying to merchants is: 'I'm gonna advertise for you at no cost all over southeastern Michigan.'"

Litwin said the ease of signing up merchants allows Club Elite to be selective.

"Our major asset is the quality of our merchants. The savings have to be considerable and we have to provide the best possible product."

A Detroit native, Litwin said even as a child the idea of growing up to be a fireman didn't interest him. And during his student days at the University of Michigan, he was involved in another retail business.

Geared for law school, he studied political science, but says Club Elite is "the culmination of all my ideas."

GILDENBERG was Litwin's roommate in Ann Arbor and was happy to

join him in the business.

Club Elite started in last year as a sole proprietorship but Litwin said he was forced to take in investors.

"It became a corporation last June and is doing phenomenally," he said.

Litwin said there are three major forms of distribution in the discount business. First, dealing with unions and non-profit organizations for fund-raisers; second, universal sales; and third, corporate gifts.

"We really did well on corporate gifts over the holidays," Litwin said. "One reason is that anything up to \$25 can be written off as a corporate gift. If someone doesn't want the membership, they can get the \$25 instead."

Litwin said people go into these kinds of businesses thinking they will make a quick million or more. A more realistic picture is "never-ending days" of beating the bushes and a holding period before there's a profit.

"It took the Entertainment Book three years to become successful and get into the black," said Litwin. Hughes Potker who started the Entertainment Book in 1962 is a close friend of Robert and Jack Litwin, his parents.

"I'VE BEEN bombarded with his aura all my life," he said, adding Potker has been an inspiration.

Gildenberg pointed out that their contract with merchants stipulates that merchandise cannot be marked up prior to applying the discount.

"We have a binding agreement with the merchant," he said. "His principal obligation is to honor the card. The merchant gets free advertising and doesn't lose a thing if no one walks in the door."

Consumers are allowed to sample membership for 10 days and then get a full refund if desired.

"Our latest venture is getting into 10 percent discounts on food," Litwin said. Presently, Club Elite has about 500 active memberships and about 1,000 additional ones out on consignment to clubs, unions and other non-profit groups.

Ninety-nine percent of the Midas Muffler shops in Michigan are signed up for Club Elite and one Standard gas station in Southfield even offers discount gas from 12 a.m. to 6 a.m. at their full service island.

You can get discounts on flowers and plants, picture framing, hardware, jewelry, office supplies, plumbing, furniture and printing to name a few.

"Saving becomes convenient," Litwin said, "because the plastic card is easy to keep with you."

For more information call Club Elite at 552-9256.

How to Make Hearts Flutter

1. Diamond pave floating heart on 14K yellow gold chain
Retail \$250.00
AT TAPPER'S \$200.00

2. 20 pt. heart shaped diamond drop on a 14K yellow gold chain
Retail \$420.00
AT TAPPER'S \$336.00

3. 14K yellow gold floating heart with diamond
Retail \$16.25
AT TAPPER'S \$13.00

(Illustrations enlarged to show detail)

This Valentine's Day celebrate your love with a gift of gold and precious gems. And if her reaction is overwhelming, don't be surprised!

FREE GIFT WRAPPING CASH REFUNDS

Tapper's Jewelry

26400 West Twelve Mile Road
in Southfield's Racquettime Mall
Northeast corner 12 Mile & Northwestern Hwy.
357-5578
Mon., Tues., Wed., Fri., Sat., 10-6, Thur., 10-9
100% Satisfaction Guaranteed