

Woman brings dolls to life



By Mary Rodriguez
staff writer

With a squeaky voice and stunning little girl smile, it's hard to picture Sunshine at rest in a suitcase between engagements with Livonia ventriloquist Muriel Linton.

The way Linton brings the apple cheek doll with blond pigtail to life an observer would expect her to dance off into the sunset singing about the good ship lollipop.

"She's certainly a big hit," said Linton, who performs for kids birthday parties, church and school assemblies, and banquets.

The newest doll in a collection of seven, Sunshine made her debut this spring and has been keeping kids spell-bound ever since.

"I've been doing (ventriloquism) 20 years and I had to keep up with the times," Linton said. "Sunshine is a modern doll. I tell her as a cousin to a child's favorite doll, and I encourage children to bring their dolls to meet her."

Standing 30 inches tall and dressed in a short sleeve blue velvet dress, black patent leather shoes and frilly white anklets, Sunshine is about the same size as some of the kids she entertains. Her yellow yarn mane is styled in chunky pigtail. The hair and soft sculpted body were created by Livonia's Anne Davis, a student in Linton's oil painting class.

"She tells jokes, riddles and sings nursery rhymes," said Linton, a former nursery school director. "I use different material for different age groups."

The best audiences are mixed age groups, she says, such as those she entertains at mother and daughter banquets. Her favorite age group is pre-

school, where kids sit in silent wonder for half an hour and then ask Sunshine numerous questions, such as does she like peanut butter sandwiches for lunch.

A SELF TAUGHT ventriloquist, Linton first became interested in ventriloquism as a teaching aid for Sunday school classes. She is a member of Faith Covenant Church in Farmington Hills.

"I walked into a toy store and saw a boy doll that was ventriloquist and thought I could use him in my class. So I bought him."

That was Andy, who still performs as a sidekick to Sunshine. His retired partner is Candy. There's also Granny who sits in a rocking chair and a host of other wood head, handcarved dolls.

After four months of practicing daily vocal exercises from a book about ventriloquism, Linton was ready to try her craft on a live audience. She has had a busy engagement calendar ever since.

Linton has never made ventriloquism a full-time job — she teaches oil painting classes from her home and at Faith Covenant Church. But she did gain wide exposure with her dolls on a Saturday morning radio program 20 years ago on WDFG-FM in Detroit and later on a television appearance with Bozo The Clown.

"I get a great deal of satisfaction entertaining children," said Linton, who has no children of her own ("except for my dolls," she says).

Linton has written and published a paperback book "Laugh Or Get A Headache" about her experiences as a ventriloquist. Linton will take requests for the book or be available for appearances. She can be reached after May 10 by calling 261-0269.

Livonia ventriloquist Muriel Linton added Sunshine, a perky doll that sings nursery rhymes and tells jokes and riddles, to her traveling variety show earlier this month. She has become a big hit with the under-10 crowd, reports Linton.

recreation news

Each week the Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Department will present a synopsis of upcoming activities in this column. For further information regarding our programs, contact our office at 474-6115. Matters regarding City Council agenda items, call our Newsline at 474-3838.

GOLF LESSONS — Learn the basic fundamentals or improve your established skills through structured lessons to be held at Silver Golf Range. Classes are 50 minutes in length, twice each week for four weeks and will begin May 21 for children and teens, adults and senior adults. Each participant will be asked to purchase a bucket of balls for each lesson. Registrations should be made at the Parks and Recreation office, \$20 for children/teens and adults and \$10 for senior adults.

INSTRUCTIONAL SPORTS CAMP — Instructional Sports Camp will again be offered this summer by the Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation and Oakland Community College. The camps will be held during the summer at the Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills. The purpose of the Instructional Sports Camp will be to provide a personal approach to the development of skills and techniques particular to each sport. Camp enrollment will be geared to a small student to instructor ratio, and will be available for both boys and girls of middle and high school age. Each individual will receive instruction in a natural progression suited to their needs. The camps will be offered on a one-week basis meeting Monday through Friday for a

total of 17.5 instructional hours per week at a cost of \$45 per camp, beginning the week of April 22. If you have any questions, call the Parks and Recreation office at 474-6115 or the OCC Physical Education Department, 471-7715.

SAN MARINO GOLF COURSE — The Parks and Recreation Division welcomes you to play the 75-acre, nine-hole San Marino Golf Course, 2694 Haledale Road, for the 1985 season from dawn to dusk, weather permitting. Present green fees will be \$5/nine holes and \$8.50/18 holes during the week and \$5.50/nine holes and \$9.50/18 holes on weekends and holidays; \$3/nine holes and \$3/18 holes on weekdays only between 11 a.m. for 4 p.m. for senior and junior golfers.

SAFETY TOWN REGISTRATION — This popular children's safety education program for 4-, 5- and 6-year-olds will begin accepting registration for the summer sessions for Farmington area residents on May 1 at the Parks and Recreation office. Sessions are 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. or 1-3 p.m. five days a week, for two weeks. The first session begins the week of June 17. A \$30 fee is required at the time of registration.

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