



Seaside Co. collection



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos

Left, Miss Ventura County Dominique Colell sculpts a Liberty Bell from ice. Top, Faye Lanphier, Miss California 1924 and, above, a modern-day rehearsal.

Missed in Santa Cruz?

Some say yes, some say no, but after a decade of turmoil, the Miss California Pageant is updated and at home in Fresno

Beauty Pageants - 1990 -

By CAROLYN LEAL
Sentinel staff writer

THE YOUNG WOMAN in the hip-high boots and welder's goggles attacked a 300-pound block of ice

with an electric chain saw, sending ice chips skittering across the stage as she carved out a shimmering liberty bell.

Dominique Colell, 18, Miss Ventura County, demonstrated her talent as an ice sculptor at the Miss California Pageant this week in Fresno, while firemen watched nervously from the wings.

Her on-stage sculpture is one sign of how the pageant has changed since it was started on the beach in Santa Cruz 75 years ago. In a show dominated by ballerinas and tap dancers, Dominique has carved new ground.

"I've been doing this for 30 years and I've never seen anything like it," said William Bertram, director of operations. "But talent is talent."

The Miss California Pageant was a magnet for protests in the 1980s when it was based in Santa Cruz, but it seems to have found a home in Fresno, a city of 407,000 in California's fertile San Joaquin Valley.

While Santa Cruz protesters captured headlines by wearing dresses made of meat and staging their own satirical "Myth California" pageant, Fresno is protest-free.

"It's a different time, a different era," said Lloyd Kennedy, head of the Fresno

Convention and Visitors Bureau. "Plus, this is a pretty conservative area; this is the heartland. Fresno is more like a Midwestern city in California."

Miss California was yanked from Santa Cruz in 1985 by irate Miss America officials and moved to San Diego, because "there was little or no effort made to keep the demonstrators from impacting the pageant," said longtime pageant director Bob Arnheim.

"They had individuals demeaning our contestants by the clothes they wore, or didn't wear. One year, someone threw raw meat on the stage. One woman kept taking her shirt off. The merchants were a little nervous about supporting us for fear they would alienate the residents of Santa Cruz."

"It was just an element, not a significant portion of the city, yet this is what was seen on TV; this is what the media chose to cover. No matter how many thousands of dollars the pageant brought to Santa Cruz, the only thing that appeared in the news were the demonstrators against the pageant, claiming these young women were being exploited," Arnheim said.

Please see PAGEANT - Page D4



Dan Coyro/Sentinel file

Ann Simonton in her skirt steak dress is escorted from the pageant after being arrested during a protest in June 1985.

Pageant

Continued from Page D1

After several years in San Diego, the pageant wound up in Fresno because it's a central location with affordable hotel rooms and a nice, 2,000-seat theater named for author William Saroyan. "Yes, it's hot, but it has other advantages," Arnhym said.

The conservative climate more than makes up for the heat.

"We're a little more traditional here. We're large, but we have small-town, wonderful ideals. Something like this is going to be welcomed with open arms," said Rhonda Schafer, Miss Fresno County 1994 and a current volunteer.

Sweat and glitter

Miss California launched its sixth year in Fresno this week with 49 fresh-faced young women on stage competing in talent (40 percent), interview (30 percent), swimsuit (15 percent) and evening wear (15 percent) segments. Tonight Miss California will be crowned.

But before the glamour and glitz, there was a lot of hard work. Young women, dressed in sweats and shorts, practiced high-energy dance routines over and over, as music from "Tarzan" and the latest Austin Powers movie boomed through the darkened theater.

They practiced being introduced, walking to center stage, pirouetting and returning. They boned up on current events for the all-important 12-minute interview, in which judges can ask anything. They snacked on grapes, Fresno's number one product, and they curled up on the auditorium floor with pillows brought from home and slept.

Miss Fresno, Heather Stocks, 18, a favorite of the hometown folks, worried that she talked too much about ballet and not enough about current events in her interview with judges. She's been studying ballet since she was 3 and she has been invited to audition with the Houston Ballet this summer.

Heather was pointed out as an example of the current crop of brainy Miss California contestants. A valedictorian, she has a grade point average that hits 4.33, because she has taken college classes while still in high school. She's been accepted at UCLA as a pre-med major and she wants to be a doctor.

Why was she attracted to Miss California? "It's a scholarship program. I'm trying to put myself through college," she said, without hesitation.

Scholarships are mentioned over and over as an incentive.

If there is an Achilles heel, it's the

Collette O'Bannon, 22, Miss Silicon Valley, was attracted by the opportunity to perform. She's

is in.

"It used to be everything was based on the bathing suit; now the swimsuit counts for only 15 percent and we refer to it as physical fitness," Arnhym said. "When Miss America started, the swimsuit used to be 100 percent. It was a bathing beauty contest. It was a way to protract the summer season for another week."

However, even Arnhym thinks the pageant might be better off without the swimsuit image. "If there is an Achilles heel, it's the swimsuit. In a dozen different ways, we continue to attack the swimsuit issue."

Miss America was ready to drop the swimsuit competition, Arnhym said. "But they polled viewers on what they thought and 79 percent were in favor."

Arnhym thinks the pageant is more relevant today with its emphasis on communication and good causes. But to Simon-ton, the pageant is still out of step with the times. "A bright, 200-pound woman would have no chance at the scholarships; a woman in a wheelchair would not win. Nothing has really changed. It's the same dinosaur it always was. We try to reveal the economic reason they have pageants, to sell commercial products during the televised portion."

"Miss America offers the largest educa-



Top to bottom:

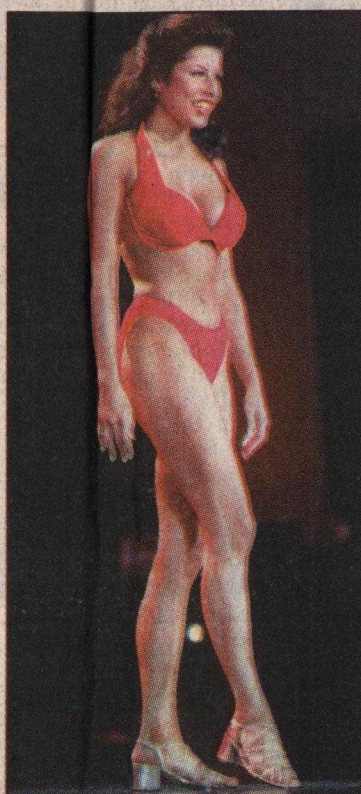
Miss California contestants take a break during rehearsals at the Saroyan Theater in Fresno.

The pageant not only allows two-piece bathing suits now, but calls it the physical fitness portion of the competition

The Miss California Pageant of 1924 focused on bathing beauties like Miss Santa Cruz Yetta Haber.

The first Miss California Pageant was in Santa Cruz. It was won by Miss Alameda, Faye Lanphier.

Miss Santa Cruz County Randi Armour joins other contestants in applauding the talent segment winner Wednesday night.



swimsuit.

Robert Arnhyrn, pageant director

second time and may go for a third try. "I'm here because it's a scholarship and a performance venue," she said. "Scholarships are relevant. Platform and talent are relevant. It's one of the few places where women who are not athletic can get scholarship money."

Changing times

If the beauty pageant is no longer the focus of controversy in the '90s, has it become an event that has slipped to the back burner of public attention?

"It's not the most burning issue on my feminist agenda. There are a lot of other things to work on," said Dr. Linda Garber, a professor of women's studies at California State University, Fresno.

"I'm glad there is scholastic support, but I don't think that's the whole thing," she added. "I see this as unequal treatment of women, objectification of women for their beauty value."

Garber said feminists are not protesting the pageant because they're busy with more important things. "The protest agenda is not the current face of feminism. A lot of people are involved in pro-active things, but they're not putting the energy into protests they way they did in the '80s."

Former protester Ann Simonton of Santa Cruz thinks public interest in Miss California is lagging, one reason it moved to Fresno from San Diego. "People are not watching it; people are not signing up and parents are not encouraging their daughters to sign up."

However, Miss California officials point out they have 49 contestants this year, the most in recent memory. To ensure a steady stream of candidates in the future, they have launched a new California Outstanding Teenager contest for young women 13 to 17. The new contest, considered "a farm camp," takes place June 26 in Fresno and has no swimsuit competition.

While the familiar formula of rewarding youth and beauty remains at the heart of Miss California, there have been changes.

More women of color are represented and women with disabilities have captured titles. The current Miss California, Danielle Coney, is black. In 1994, Heather Whitestone, who is deaf, won the Miss America title. The reigning Miss America, Nicole Johnson, wears an insulin pump and is a spokeswoman for the American Diabetes Association.

Scholarships have grown, with \$75,000 being handed out this year at Miss California. More attention is paid to communication skills, and every candidate must have a "platform," a cause to support.

"The platform changed the function of Miss America (and Miss California) from a young woman who cut ribbons and waved in a parade," said director Arnhyrn. "She was a beauty queen. Now, we've turned her into a social activist. She must select something of national social significance. This is what she now does. Miss America is totally occupied with her platform—whether it be AIDS, the homeless or battered women. We're looking for slightly different kinds of contestants. Communication skills are way up at the top. The interview is now worth 30 percent of the scoring."

Another change: the swimsuit competition is shrinking in importance and fitness

scholarships available for women in the whole world. Education scholarships shouldn't be for sale. We feel individuals who are scholastically talented shouldn't have to do some kind of hula so they can be taken on the road and shown to business groups around the country."

Simonton once donned a dress made of steak and cold cuts to demonstrate what she called the "meat-market" aspect of the Miss California pageant.

But she has moved on to other causes. She founded Media Watch, an organization that educates the public to be more critical of the media, to be conscious of who owns and controls the flow of information, and she lectures around the country.

'Brilliance and beauty'

The Miss California Pageant celebrates its 75th anniversary this year. It started in Santa Cruz as one of the first Miss America franchises in 1924. The first bathing suit contests were staged at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. A 1924 photo shows a string of eager contestants in swim suits standing on the sand, smiling into the sun.

"The visiting beauties come from 40 leading towns and cities. All of the girls are of unusual brilliance as well as extreme beauty," the Santa Cruz Morning Sentinel reported.

In another story, the paper revealed, "Los Angeles has selected a perfect entry for the beauty contest...Miss Lillian Knight was disclosed to have a perfect figure and is possessed of such lovely auburn hair that the judges insisted upon its genuineness being vouched for by a committee of doctors before selecting her."

On June 5, "the girls" appeared on stage at the new Santa Cruz Theater.

"One tableau presented the girls in sports costume with tennis racquets used to send showers of candy into the audience. Another showed the girls gathered for tea. One disclosed a number of the girls in negligees under dimmed lights." According to the Morning Sentinel, "The house went wild with enthusiasm."

On June 7, 1924, some 20,000 people "packed the beach for the bathing girl review." The candidates wore swimsuits given them by a San Francisco firm. Watsonville sent over a truckload of apples which were handed out.

Winner Faye Lanphier, Miss Alameda, was crowned that night during a grand ball at the Boardwalk Casino. She was chosen because she epitomized the qualities of the California girl, judges said. She went on to win the Miss America title in 1925.

Miss Understood

The pageant moved from the Boardwalk to the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium in 1966 and continued to bask in civic boosterism until the 1980s, when Santa Cruz activists

objected to the message they felt the pageant delivered: that women were objects to be marketed.

Times had changed and newly liberated women were anxious to shed old, repressive roles.

In the 1980s, protesters created their own Myth California pageant with a 200-pound beauty waving from the back of a convertible and contestants wearing sashes declaring themselves "Miss Understood" and "Miss Treated."

Recalled actress Camrym Mannheim in a recent appearance in Santa Cruz, "Each year in a town dedicated to naturalness, anti-materialism, feminism, liberalism and earthy values, arrived a procession of capped teeth, long blond hair and plastic surgery." She joined the Praying Mantis Brigade, named for the insect that devours its mate, to protest "the objectification of women and the glorification of the beauty myth."

Simonton, a former fashion model and Sports Illustrated swimsuit cover, donned her skirt steak dress, got arrested and captured more press than the contestants. Pageant goers complained that they were forced to look at well-endowed topless women on their way in and out of the Civic.

"It got to the point where men were afraid to bring their wives and mothers," recalled Arnhyrn. "They would come here and then stay in their motel rooms."

The protests reached a crescendo of sorts in 1985 when "the blood of raped women" was collected and thrown on the steps of the Civic Auditorium.

Finally, the pageant officials decided they'd had enough. They announced they were moving to San Diego.

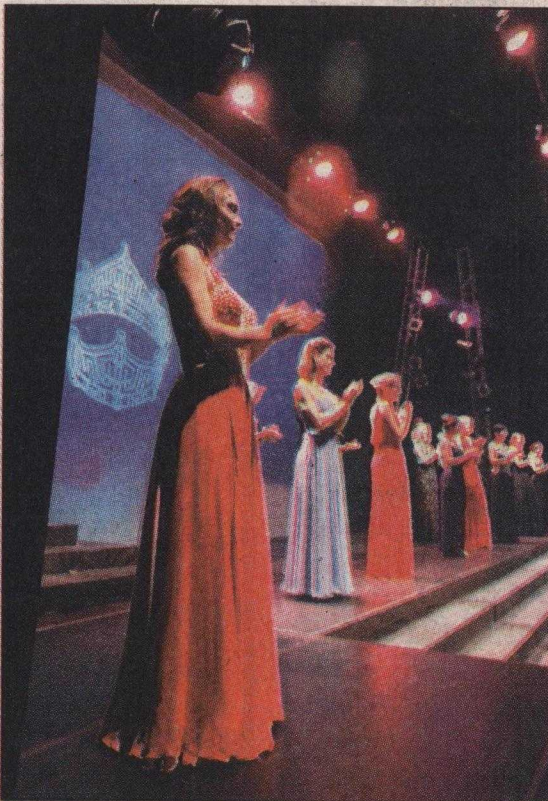
But Simonton and other protesters followed.



Seaside Co. collection



Seaside Co. collection



Michelle Anderson won the Miss Santa Cruz title in 1988 and infiltrated the Miss California pageant. During the televised final, she unfurled a banner from her bodice, which said, "Pageants Hurt All Women." Before she was hustled off stage, she yelled that the new Miss California was anorexic.

"Women contestants prostitute themselves," Anderson charged. "They pad themselves. They tape their breasts to make more cleavage. They spray adhesive on their butts to get their swimsuits to cling. They starve themselves for months."

Anderson went on to get a degree from Yale Law School and she is teaching at Vil-

lanova University, Simonton said.

Eventually, the protests waned. "The pageant ended up on private property at Sea World, where protests could only take place far away at the entrance," Simonton said.

The Pageant goes on

Despite the tumultuous history, the Miss Santa Cruz County competition quietly continues. Randi Armour, a 19-year-old Cabrillo College student, represented Santa Cruz County this week in Fresno. She was selected from 10 contestants in February at Harbor High School's Theater.

Janice Allegri, who was Miss Santa Cruz County in 1972, is co-director of the Miss Santa Cruz organization. "People still call it a beauty pageant, but they've tried to erase the beauty pageant image," Allegri said. "The girls have the platforms they support. I only earned \$300, but Randi earned \$3,000 as Miss Santa Cruz County. By being a Miss California contestant, she'll earn another \$1,000."

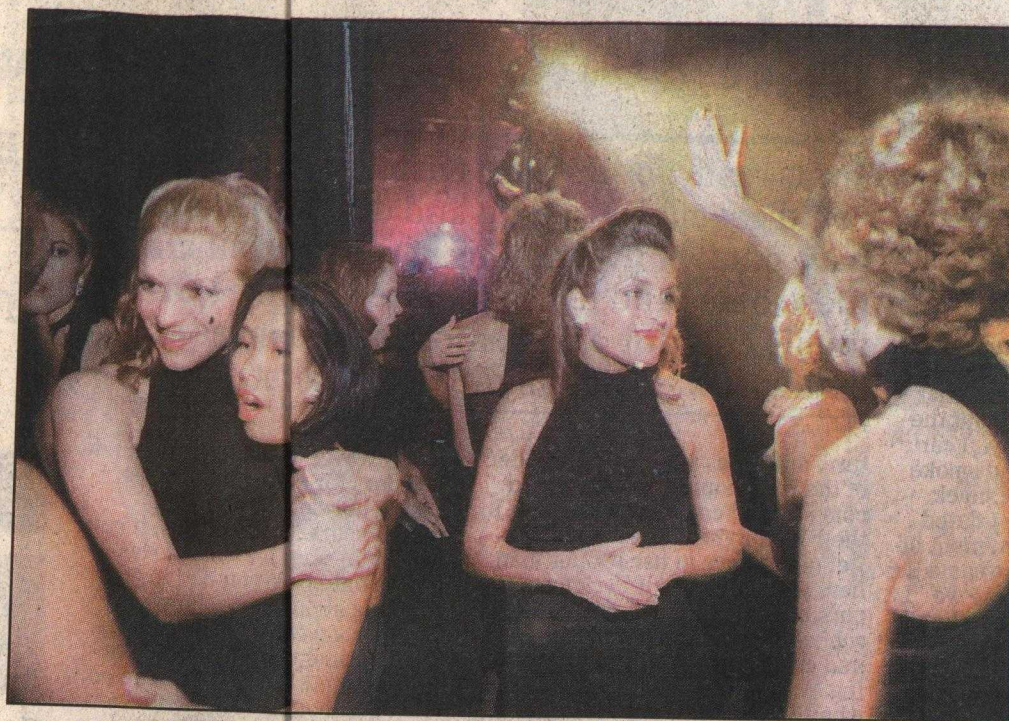
"When I went to Miss California, I was very shy, very introverted," Allegri recalled. "Even though I was a cheerleader in high school, I was very nervous in front of people. It gave me a lot of confidence and an education in public relations and communication."

Francine Oputa, chair of the Women's Resource Center at California State University, Fresno, said the Miss California contest can be a means to an end. "When you talk about opportunities for women today, it means a wide range of women being able to do what they want to do. It's difficult for me to put down beauty pageants."

"I'm concerned about the objectification of women and we still struggle with the whole body image thing—eating disorders and what is beauty. But the world is more accepting and this is Fresno. It's a conservative town."

A Day in the Life

Dancing, singing, public speaking: It's in the job description for Randi Armour, Miss Santa Cruz County



Everybody wins, says Miss SC

By CAROLYN LEAL
Sentinel staff writer

RANDI ARMOUR, 19-year-old Miss Santa Cruz County, recently showed a high school class her crown and asked the students what it told them about her.

The kids said she was "a cheese-ball," an airhead. She was into beauty pageants, attracted by the glittering crown, they said, "You smile a lot and you have that wave."

"They had all those concepts people have who don't understand anything about the program," Randi said, shaking her head.

The kids also guessed she was 23, drove a Honda Civic and lived with her boyfriend.

"Wrong," Randi said. "I'm 19; I drive a Ford truck. I live with family friends and I'm entering the Miss California Pageant because of the scholarship money. I get \$1,000 just for going."

The kids perked up when they heard that.

Randi also asked the students for their stereotype of the homeless. "Someone with a sign standing on the side of the road," they said.

"No one mentioned the children," Randi said. Homeless children are her special concern, her "platform" in pageant language.

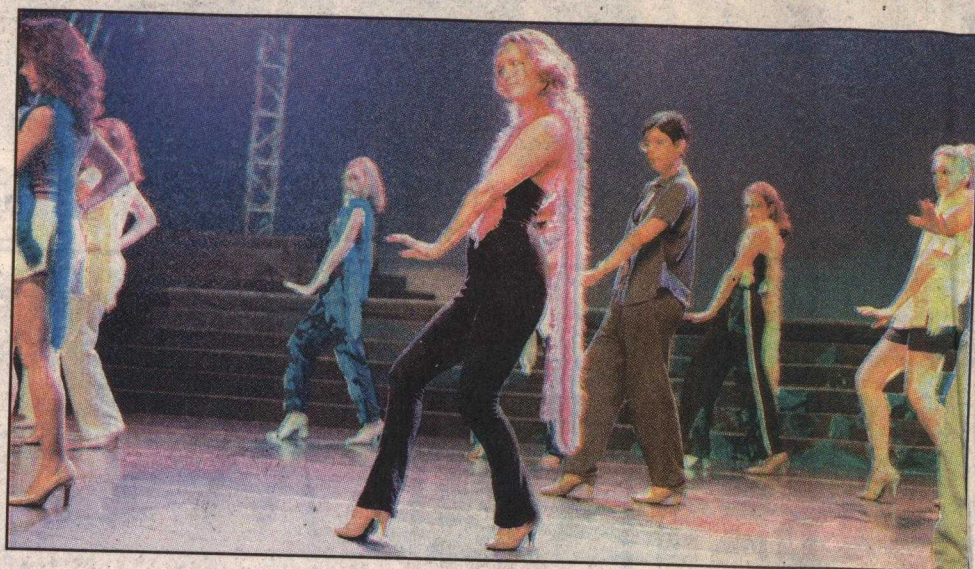
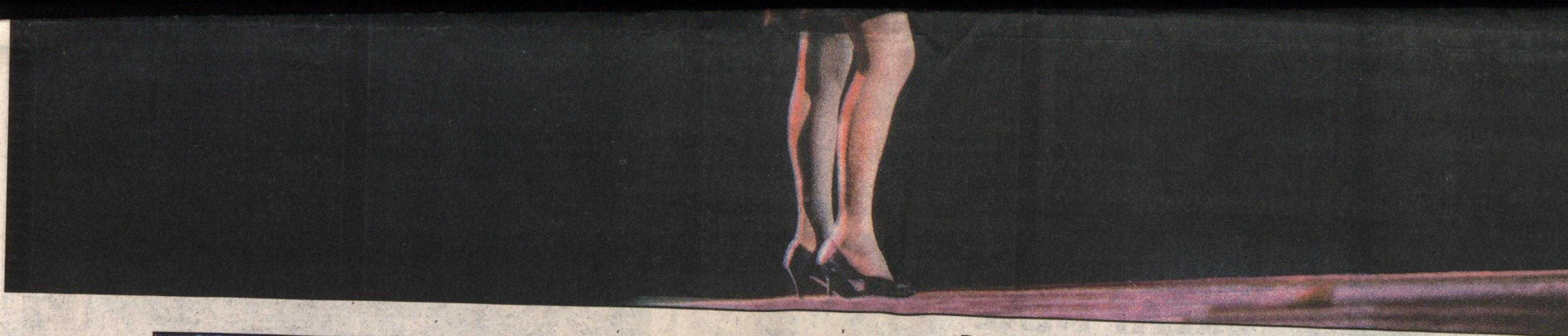
Randi, who has just completed her freshman year at Cabrillo College, represented Santa Cruz County at the Miss California Pageant this week in Fresno. It's her second trip to the state pageant. She was Miss Santa Clara last year.

"I was not concentrating on winning," she said. "I was only 18 and down just for the experience. I decided to have a great time and learn what it's all about."

This year she's serious.

Randi is attracted by the promise of scholarship money. She plans to transfer to Belmont University in Nashville, Tenn. and to study the music business, in particular marketing and advertising.

She and her sister Misty, 21, also a student at Belmont, are a country singing duo, called Sister Heartache. They sing at fairs, festivals and church events. Her sister was Miss San Mateo County in 1997 and also



Regardless of your feelings about the Miss California Pageant, for the young women who participate, it is undeniably a lot of hard work. Randi Armour, Miss Santa Cruz County, spent Wednesday exemplifying just that.

In photos clockwise from top: Armour and other contestants get out preshow jitters in the wings as Wednesday night's show begins. It's time for Armour to be introduced to the Fresno Convention Center crowd as Miss Santa Cruz County. Armour helps her pageant roommate Jennifer Davelaar (Miss Contra Costa County) with a last-minute makeup adjustment backstage. Under the watchful eye of a pageant choreographer, Armour rehearses a campy 'Austin Powers, The Spy Who Shagged Me' routine. Armour, center, uses her dancing talents to the utmost during hours of rehearsals.



Staff Photos by Shmuel Thaler

San Mateo County in 1997 and also a Miss California contestant.

When she's not in school and not performing, Randi works for an interior design firm, Park Avenue Collection in Willow Glen. She graduated from Santa Clara High School.

She's a size 6, "sometimes an 8," and stands 5 feet 7½ inches. She will not discuss her weight. "I decline to answer; never ask a woman her weight."

Tap dancing is her talent. She's been tap dancing since she was 3.

She is one of five daughters of George and G.H. Armour of San Jose. Her mother is director of a Miss California-affiliated pageant in San Jose and is involved in a new teen contest launched by Miss California.

Randi's platform is education of homeless children. She has worked as a volunteer with New Horizons School in Capitola, a school for homeless children, and lobbied for state money for the privately funded school.

"I've performed for the children, done dishes, made phone calls," she said. "It's an issue I feel is important and needs some attention."

Asked why she is returning to the Miss California Pageant, she said, "Number One is the scholarship money. The cost of school is very expensive. My older sister is at the university and it's very difficult to afford."

She also likes meeting new people. "At Miss California, I've met people from all over the state."

She describes herself as lighthearted. "I like to laugh. I'm working with a personal trainer and we're always laughing."

She likes to snowboard and to skateboard and is most comfortable in jeans. "I'm not one of those lacy, frilly kinds of girls," she said, "but there's this whole other performing side of me. I can wear holey jeans one day and be in a nice suit the next day."

She laments that people form an opinion of the Miss California pageant without seeing the work that goes on behind the scenes. "I wish the people who were against the program would attend rehearsals and see the hard work involved."

Dressed in a black halter top and a yellow skirt, she tap danced her way through the talent portion of the competition to the tune of "Bumble Boogie." She donned a sparkly red chiffon gown her mom purchased for the gown segment and a black one-piece swimsuit for what is now called "fitness."

Even though she did not win, Randi said she enjoyed the experience.

"Nobody loses. You come out with the scholarship money and the girl who ends up winning is like our team leader."