



Mike McCollum

Edith Scrivani, a fixture at the Santa Cruz County Fair for 15 years, shows up in a different costume every day.

'Scrivi'

Fair favorite friendly and saucy as ever

By ETHAN BARON
STAFF WRITER

DECORATING THE back of 76-year-old Edith Scrivani's blouse is a collage of ribbons awarded her by her friends at the fair: "Best Carcass," "Champion Sow," even "Best Udder."

"It's a trick they played on me," says Scrivani, making no effort to remove the unusual tribute to her popularity.

Better known as "Scrivi," Scrivani has been a fixture at the fair for almost 15 years. Usually she can be found in the Home Arts Building, where she has worked for more than a decade, she says. But she may be hard to recognize: Scrivani wears a different costume every day, sometimes a clown, sometimes a strawberry, sometimes an apple.

"She's something else," says Sue King, a long-time co-worker of Scrivani's at the fair. "A lot of people just come in to see her." Adds Pat Gavin, another friend from the fair, "If you come out here and you're depressed, go see Scrivi, and you're not depressed any more."

Scrivani herself has another cure for depression: monkeys. More than 500 monkeys fill her Watsonville home, stuffed monkeys, monkey clocks, monkey "terlet paper holders," a six-foot-tall monkey named "Harvey," who sits in his own full-sized rocking chair. "If you want to be thoughtful and caring to somebody," she says, "give them a monkey."

Described by her friends as a generous woman who cooks big pots of soup for her co-workers

at the fair, Scrivani spends much of her free time volunteering for the Salesian priests in Watsonville. When the 1989 earthquake knocked her house of its foundation and made it uninhabitable, Scrivani ignored her own problems and went to the armory to cook and serve food and give out blankets, says Gavin. "She doesn't worry about herself, she worries about everyone else," Gavin says.

Scrivani was born in 1917 on a ship en route to America from Germany. Her mother died in childbirth, and her father died before the boat reached the United States. Fortunately, she had grandparents in Atlantic City, New Jersey who took her in and raised her.

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Her grandfather, she says, was in the "entertainment business." While she declined to have published the kind of entertainment her grandfather provided, the world in which she grew up prepared her for an exciting life. "If it was illegal," she says, "I did it." But, she adds, "this generation knows nothing of all that. We didn't drink like you guys do these days, we didn't take dope, we had fun."

Kids are different now, she says. "When was the last time you heard a kid say 'pardon me, excuse me?'" Scrivani asks. "I won't take it from 'em. I'll trip 'em if I have to," says the diminutive grandmother of two. "They need to be taught respect and manners. It won't hurt 'em," she says.

Such comments can be expected from a woman who spent a number of years teaching kindergarten in Atlantic City and Brooklyn, New York. For 15 years she worked in a Freedom child care center until she retired in 1979. Her time at the child care center gave her both a love for dressing in costume and her name. The kids, she

said, would always call her "Mrs. Fanny" or "Mrs. Granny," until one child started calling her "Scrivi" and the name stuck.

Yesterday, Scrivani spent part of the day out of costume. She had to see a doctor in San Jose, and she didn't want to go in a strawberry suit. She wears a bandage on her face where some cancer was removed. Scrivani pats her chest. "All this is rubber. A kidney's gone, the tip of three toes are amputated." She gives a saucy smile and a friendly squeeze on the arm. "Nobody gave us a rose garden," she says. "You have to take life as it comes, honey."