

## **MS. MISSOURI SENIOR AMERICA PAGEANT HISTORY**

By Judy Lewis, Founder-Director

1. In 1988, as Director of Senior Programs/GoldenCare Plus for Christian Hospital in Florissant, Missouri, I wanted to develop a program that paid tribute to the vibrancy and talents of women 60 years and older. I thought of doing some sort of pageant but was not sure how to approach its development.
2. In the Fall of 1988, I went to the Missouri Governor's Conference on Aging, which was held in St. Louis. There I discovered an interesting session being offered by Senior America, Inc. It was presented by the director of the Ms. Senior Arkansas Pageant.
3. I attended, and there also met Valerie White, who was with the St. Louis County CORE program. We both really liked the idea and decided that we could network to develop such a program. We agreed that I would take the leadership role since I was pretty sure I could get funding.
4. I was able to secure major funding from both Christian Hospital Northeast and the regional McDonald's owners. Christian Hospital had an internally based McDonald's Restaurant.
5. First pageant was held in March 1989. The now-deceased weatherman from Channel 5 (Bob Richards) was the host that first year. I had Marty Bronson as a judge as well as entertainment during the tallying process. I had met him at a local Senior Fair where he was performing and was aware of his St. Louis' prominence from being a host on St. Louis television, and also Marty's Place in Gas Light Square. The National Pageant Executive was present as well as 1988 Ms. Senior America who also performed. We had 12-inches of snow that afternoon, but the show went on despite Bob Richards' attempt to get it cancelled so he could leave and get back to his weather forecasting. Tickets were free, and we had a pretty good crowd – held in the Christian Hospital Northeast Auditorium. Mayor Jim Eagan of Florissant was present and was my "acting Honorary Chairman." Mayor Eagan continued to serve in this capacity for several years. We did get some good TV coverage as well.
6. The following years brought more attention as the Pageant experienced a good reputation and more entrants (from eight to 12). We also got the endorsement of the State's Governor and other governmental officials with various appearances by some and proclamations by others.
7. I served as the Pageant Director from 1989 to 1996. I officially appointed Marty Bronson as the Master of Ceremonies from 1990 going forward. We were able to secure some noteworthy judges with experience in entertainment, the arts, government and military positions, TV personalities, and others who were able to "judge" based on their life experiences. It became somewhat prestigious to be asked to be a judge for this Pageant.
8. Along with having CORP (specifically Valerie White) serve on my Pageant team, I invited Midwest Agency on Aging to help. They actually sponsored their own pageant, with the winner participating in the Missouri Pageant. I asked Pris Metzger to serve as the Pageant production coordinator also. There were other spin-off pageants in a few areas of the state that were

feeders into this pageant.

9. During my years as Director, I was also able to secure some noteworthy appearances for Ms. Senior Missouri around the state. When Del Hoffman was crowned Ms. Senior America in 1994 at Reno, this was the crowning glory for our pageant. A couple of special appearances she made were being hosted by the Missouri Governor in Jefferson City – he also proclaimed it Del Hoffman Day throughout the state shortly after she won the crown; carrying the Olympic Torch in St. Louis in 1994 when it was coming through the city; singing the National Anthem at the July 4, 1994 Cardinal Baseball game.
  
10. From 1989 to 1996, the Ms. Senior Missouri winners had good success at the national Ms. Senior America Pageant as Follows:
  - \* 1989 – Claire Sherwood (tap dancer) – Top Ten
  - \* 1990 – Scotty Hartig (dancer/singer) – 3rd Runner Up
  - \* 1991 – Fannie Scantlin (Minnie Pearl impersonator) – Top Ten
  - \* 1992 – Perry Moreno (singer) – 2nd Runner Up
  - \* 1994 – Del Hoffman (singer) – Ms. Senior America
  - \* 1995 – Pat Bruder (tap dancer) – Talent Award
  - \* 1996 – Gerri Brown (tap dancer) – Top TenNumbers of states participating in the national pageant grew from 25 in 1989 to around 45 when I left in 1996.
  
11. I left the employment of Christian Hospital in 1996, at which time sponsorship by both the hospital and McDonald's ended.
  
12. My time with the pageant is still one of my most treasured experiences and I still miss it.

Written by Judy Lewis in November 2014

## **Twenty-Five years of Cameo Club History 1989 to 2014**

As early as 1990 some of the 1989 contestants became members of a group, they called the Cameo Club, to bring word of the Senior Missouri Pageant and promote senior awareness. The state had to have pageants for five years before they could qualify to become members of the National Cameo Club. That happened in 1994. The original 1990 club numbered ten, and they started making plans to book dates to perform for ladies' groups where they could promote the pageant and solicit contestants. They decided to meet four times per year to keep up to date on activities. The club had to start meeting monthly when Joan Daues became director) to keep up with our activities. There are no active members from those early years, so Helen Kahre and I (Pat Bruder) have become the seniors representing membership since 1995. It has been inspiring to be part of a group of women who have accomplished so much!

At the end of 1996 Judy Lewis left Senior Missouri with no backing and no financial support. Del Hoffman, who was Ms. Senior America 1994, was generous and interested enough to take over. She worked every possibility to get sponsorship and support for the pageant. She arranged for the 1997 pageant to be held during the Missouri State Fair.

Where Joan Daues was selected Senior Missouri and was to become a very important part of Senior Missouri. It was the first appearance of the Cameo Kickers – who tap danced under the direction of Pat Bruder! The tambourine number was also performed under the direction of Claire Sherwood – Our first Queen.

The 1998 pageant was held during the Senior Olympic Games in Columbia, Missouri at Stevens College Windsor Auditorium. Dolores Rehling was 1<sup>st</sup> Runner-Up, but later became the 1998 Queen – She also was an important part of the firm foundation of Cameo. She kindly became choreographer for the tap group and was the driving force to make our tambourine group the best. After the 1998 Pageant, Joan Daues was courageous enough to agree to be the state director. With no experience in this field, she took over with determination to make this an outstanding Cameo Club and a great pageant. She found venues which had pleasant theaters and were affordable to the budget, which she worked so hard to acquire.

In 2001 Joan arranged for the use of the Florissant Civic Center Theatre, which has become our home. While working on pageant duties, she put much effort into making the Cameo Showcase a success, to earn funds to help support the Pageant. The club did 20 to 25 shows a year – which she booked, toted equipment, emceed, and made hundreds of phone calls to make sure everyone knew they were listed to entertain, where to go, and when!

A few years later she formed a group of former Queens to make appearances to further awareness of senior women and what they can accomplish in their lives. She asked Marlene Grant, Ms. Missouri Senior 1996, to direct the group. Joan made the Ms. Senior Missouri Cameo Club a self-sustaining organization, which supported the pageant as well as donates to a number of worthy charities.

In 2008 and 2009, Jan Barrett (2005) joined Joan as State Co-Directors. Joan wanted to retire and leave the position to a competent and creative person.

In 2010, Jan Barrett became State Director. She was a perfect choice as she built on the established foundation, fine-tuned the rules and regulations, and continued to help the club grow.

2011 found Barbara Malta and Dennise LaFerre as State Co-Directors. They continued the successful hard work and determination to keep the pageant tops and activities growing.

In 2012 and 2013 Dennise was joined by Christine DeHart (2008) who shared the responsibilities and continued to create growth in the club.

And here we are in 2014 with Peggy Eggers (2011) as director, doing a great job. Our pageant this year was fabulous and made the 25<sup>th</sup> year a beautiful and outstanding occasion.

We know, along with the state directors, that all this success would not have been possible without the hard work and expertise of the ladies of the Cameo Club. I wish there was time and enough paper to give credit to each one. I must credit these individuals:

- Marcene Tockman (1999) who has been the led Stage Co-Director along with me (Pat Bruder) for 14 years.
- The backstage hands, directed by Sue Fleming and Jan Barrett, which functions like a well-oiled machine.
- Vickie Fenster, who creates our gorgeous stage settings.
- The ladies in the wings and dressing rooms
- Those greeting the guests: Ushers and ticket handlers.
- They all spend hours in meetings and privately making plans and arrangements to make their sections run perfectly.
- A twosome we can't overlook are Betty Tecklin and Dennise LaFarre, who (for years) have done a marvelous job of making sure we have lots of great food to keep us going.
- Much credit also goes to the members who meet monthly for club business and discussions of new projects. Of course, a meeting and nice lunch is always pleasant!

Through the last 19 years I have seen many talented, industrious, devoted women join our club. I've made wonderful friendships – as I'm sure all our members have. The group has grown from the original ten members in 1990 to the present 88 members, which makes it the second largest club in Senior America.

It's a sisterhood – devotion – dedication – and elegance, which the club is founded on.

I hope everyone who has been part of the Cameo Club feels as Judy Lewis does – It is a time to be remembered as one of life's treasures!

Written by Pat Bruder, Ms. Missouri Senior America 1995