

Former Miss USA marks agency's 20th birthday

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STAFF WRITER

Mary Therese Friel traveled the world several times over when she was Miss USA 1979 and then a model with the renowned Ford Agency.

But when she wanted to get off the celebrity merry-go-round, there was just one place to be: her hometown.

Twenty years ago Friel opened Mary Therese Friel LLP, a model and pageant coaching agency that focused only on teenaged girls. While other agencies have come and gone, Friel and her partner and husband Kent Friel have steadily built their talent pool, now including both genders and all ages. Their efforts along with their contacts have helped bring national accounts to Rochester.

The company has sent models around the world and seen them move on to acting in soap operas and major motion pictures, but most business is in the Rochester area. The Friels represent 300 models and service about 150 clients.

"Rochester has a wonderful supply of down-to-earth, girl-next-door and boy-next-door talent," Mary Therese said from her home-studio in Mendon.

Rochester also is an upstate New York advertising capital, added Kent. Because of Eastman Kodak Co., the city has a large number of professional photographers.

Mary Therese Friel models can be seen in the annual report for the Strong National Museum of Play, in the "I Love New York" campaign, in various *Democrat and Chronicle* publications and, of course, in Kodak ads, where Mary Therese got her start modeling at age 11.

Laura Sadowski, vice president for marketing at Strong Museum, worked with the Friels on a tight deadline for producing publicity materials just before the museum expansion opened in 2006.

"I don't know if it's in large part the personality of Mary Therese Friel LLC, or the personalities of Mary Therese and Kent. They choose to work with talent as easygoing ... as they are," Sadowski said.

Mary Therese selects the models and the jobs the company takes. Kent focuses on training and placement.

Also defining the business are the types of work the Friels don't take — lingerie, bathing suits (except for pageants and



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Mary Therese, Kent Friel

Owners, Mary Therese Friel, LLC

Ages: Mary Therese, 48; Kent, 34.

Town: Mendon

Education: Both have a bachelor's degree in communications from St. John Fisher College.

Family: Married 14 years.

Prior experience: Mary Therese — Miss USA 1979, Ford Agency model, diplomat, junior college instructor; Kent — master photographer's assistant and instructor.

water park advertising) and nude modeling. Mary Therese closely guards the reputation of the company that bears her name, and the dreams and money of her talent.

"She doesn't send us on jobs we would feel uncomfortable with," said Mia Mueller of Macedon, Wayne County, whose whole family — daughter Alina, 8, son Noah, 6, and husband, Eric — has modeled with the Friels.

The Friels won't discuss financial figures, but "we've had steady growth, non-stop for 20 years," Mary Therese said.

Even in lean years, the Friels said they look at every pro bono assignment as an entree to a paying job later on. The couple, their models and affiliated photographers also donate time to Advertising Council campaigns and other causes.

For that, Mary Therese credits Muhammad Ali, whom she met when she was Miss USA. He told her, "Service to others is the rent we pay for a room in the hereafter."

In the Friels' case, that room will be decorated in Mary Therese's signature color — pink. □

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KEY TIP

"Be honest," said Mary Therese Friel. Added Kent Friel, "Your clients will always know where you stand."