



Mary Therese Friel, LLC

Full Service Modeling Agency & Complete Training Program

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MARY THERESE FRIEL

Owner, Mary Therese Friel, LLC

BY STEPHANIE WILLIAMS | PHOTO BY RITA LAVECK

She's sparkled at Studio 54 and attended the Royal Wedding of Charles and Diana. She's shared the stage with Mohammed Ali as well as a Good Housekeeping cover with Cheryl Tiegs. She's partied in the Hamptons with a circle no stranger to spotting themselves in Sunday Styles. When imagining what it's like to be Mary Therese Friel, a Vanity Fair photo shoot comes naturally. But this self-fashioned "country girl" feels most at home with her gracious husband and business partner, Kent on an 11-acre ranch in Mendon she had purchased almost immediately after being crowned 1979's Miss USA.

"Rochester is such an awesome market," says Friel, who thoroughly evaluates everyone who shows up at her studio regardless of height or weight. "It's wonderful and grounding. Everyone here is so real and beautiful. You don't have to put on airs and you can be yourself. Because of that, there is all kinds of room for all kinds of looks."

Could it be the studio carpet matching this season's girliest Essie nail polish shade? The allure of sharing oxygen space with Miss USA 1979? Oh, sure. But above everything else, Friel's refreshing balance of modesty and candor has upheld her modeling, talent, and self-development agency serving Rochester and beyond for 25 years. Beginning solely as a self-development coach for teenage girls using a charm school model, the business grew as casting agents, advertising agencies, and newspapers had heard of her youthful client base.

"Modeling seemed like a natural progression as I was getting calls from TV stations, charities, and places like Kodak saying they heard about these lovely young ladies I was working with and hoping they could model for us," says Friel. "When Kent came into the business, we five times grew and began working with children, grown-ups, and seniors. We say we go to diapers to diapers!"

For Friel, it all started in the neighborhood at age 11, where she was noticed at play and was encouraged to become a Kodak girl. She just short of stumbled into becoming Miss USA after a chance encounter with a billboard while studying at St. John Fisher College and is candid about her blessings, which she was not set out to achieve (she had hoped to be an attorney or a veterinarian). Friel hopes she can instill the same values and work ethic that earned her a horse and a car all before age 16 in her "kids."

"It all boils down to self-esteem," says Friel. Anyone who wishes to become a model or actor under her umbrella participates in a 10-session training program where they learn essential skills adding that extra sparkle from good posture and table manners to learning your coloring and choosing a proper diet. After learning the right way to do things (which Friel stresses

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is in no way the same thing as changing an individual), girls in particular will be well-equipped in any situation to behave like a lady- be it attending her prom or meeting the President.

Those who wish to continue with Friel as a model have been sent all over the world – two in particular have found success in Manhattan – but not without Mary Therese or Kent's care to keep them grounded in themselves. Friel's remarkable sense of mentorship keeps her girls, "good girls."

"I've traveled around the world twice and all over it six times," says Friel. "I'd been offered incredible jobs but they had strings attached I was not willing to pull. I opt to make my company wholesome and swimwear or lingerie is not my thing. I want my girls to be proud of what they do and the reason so many parents send their children to us is because I uphold those 'good girl' values."



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