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Issue 39
May / June 2016
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Miss USA 1979

Mary Therese Friel, a beauty queen and business woman, is Flower City's model of success

Scotch Whisky : Two Aficionados Talk About Their Passion

Rochester's Sweetheart

Mary Therese Friel is Flower City's model of success

By Amy Cavalier

Watching Miss USA pageants on television with her grandmother as a young girl, Mary Therese Friel never dreamed someday that would be her.

On April 30, 1979 though, she won the title, proudly carrying the crown all the way to Australia where she took sixth-place in the Miss Universe competition later that year.

"Picture this 19-year-old girl from Pittsford wins Miss USA," she said. "I was over the moon but I really had no idea what I was getting myself into."

A beauty queen and business woman, Friel's life has been a series of incredible opportunities, serendipity and strategic decision making, anchored in a strong Catholic upbringing, a deep loyalty to her hometown and firm commitment to giving back. With the same grace, poise and dignity that helped her capture the title of Miss USA, she has built a successful career as a modeling, pageantry and

self-development coach since 1987.

"She is such a driven and focused person," said Tom Proietti, former chairwoman of the communications-journalism program at St. John Fisher College in Rochester. "She sets goals and she goes after them. No sidetracks and no apologies."

Friel has appeared in Good Housekeeping magazine, People magazine twice and the cover of Vogue Italia. For years she has been the top coach in the nation in the Northeast in two states. Locally, she has helped coach Miss New York and Miss New Jersey titleholders through to the Miss USA pageant, including Candace Kuykendall, Miss New York Teen USA 2006 and Miss New York USA 2014.

Her proudest moments though are being recognized for her commitment to being a successful entrepreneur, philanthropist and role model. In 1990, Friel received The 1000 Points of Light Award from the President

of the United States through Give 5 and the Independent Sector. In 2015, she was recognized with Causewave Community Partners (formerly the Ad Council) Chairman's Award for volunteerism.

"I want my greatest accomplishment in life to be what I do for others," she said.

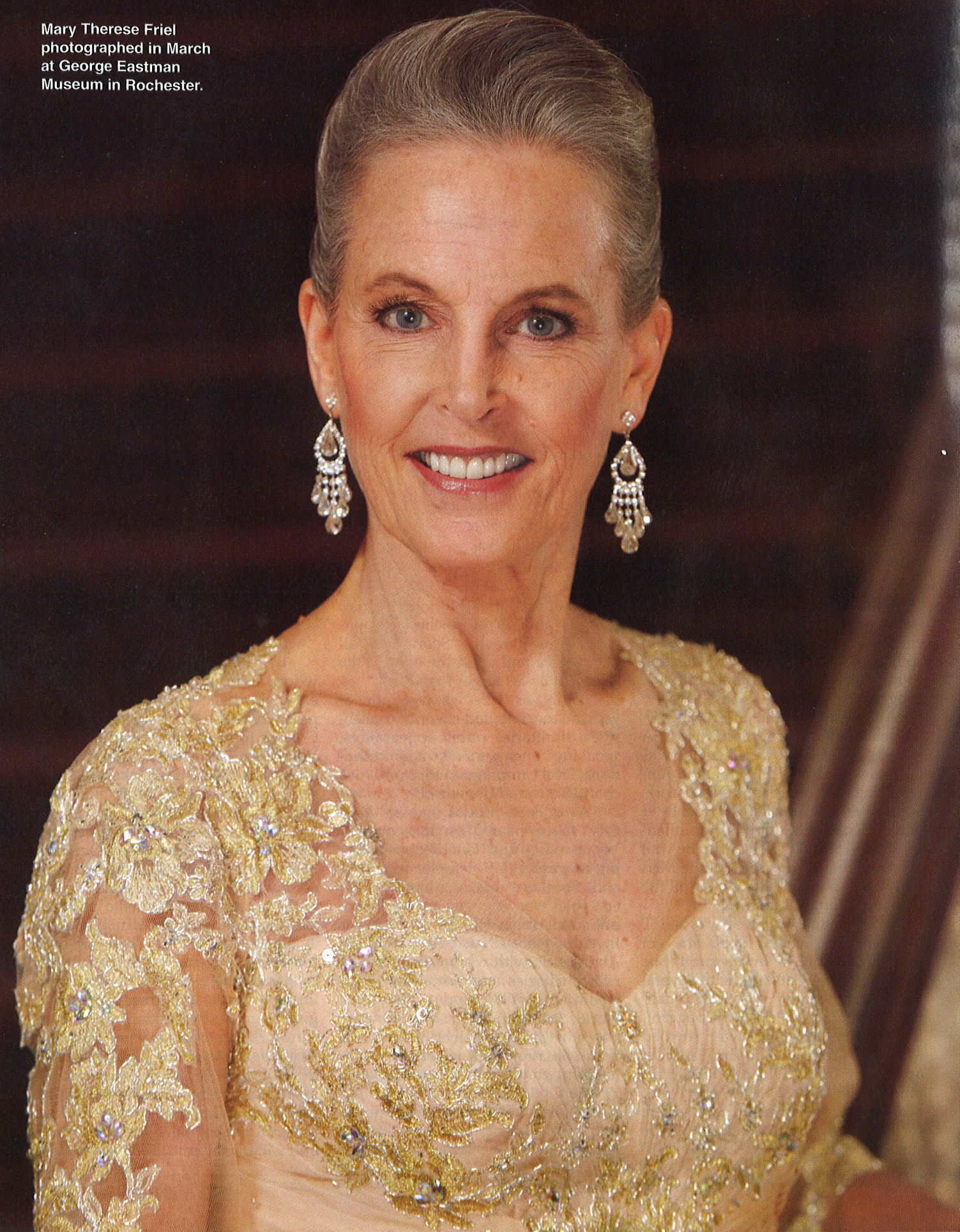
From Kodak to catwalk

Friel's modeling career began at the age of 11 with the Eastman Kodak Company. She earned enough money to purchase a brand new Camaro before she was old enough to drive it. Friel considered a number of careers before setting her sights on becoming one of the top models in the world.

"If you're going to do something that's your passion, don't go for it any less than 100 percent," she said.

Friel's parents Dolores and William Friel encouraged balance — church, school, work and home life.

Mary Therese Friel photographed in March at George Eastman Museum in Rochester.



Mary Therese Friel's career highlights

- **Age 11** — Started as a Kodak model
- **February 1979** — Won Miss New York USA title
- **April 1979** — Crowned Miss USA
- **July 1979** — Earned a sixth-place finish in the Miss Universe competition
- **1980** — Appeared on cover of Good Housekeeping magazine
- **1981-1982** — Worked for Ford Models
- **1981** — Appeared on cover of Italian Vogue
- **1987** — Founded MTF, LLC, a modeling, pageantry and self-development coaching facility
- **1990** — Awarded The 1000 Points of Light Award from the President of the United States (through Give 5 and the Independent Sector)
- **May 2015** — Received The Chairman's Award from Causewave Community Partners (previously the Ad Council of Rochester)

She graduated from Pittsford Sutherland High School in 1977 and began classes at St. John Fisher College in communications before transferring to the University of Miami's pre-law program.

While in Florida, Friel was approached about being in a Miss USA state pageant. However, she was homesick and couldn't imagine representing any state but New York. Soon after she returned to Rochester and returned to St. John Fisher in January 1979. She saw a flyer on the wall at school that read, "You Can Be Miss Universe." She took the poster off the wall and brought it home.

Friel's biggest expense was a \$150 pink chiffon pageant dress she got at a bridal store in Irondequoit. She traveled to the Catskills with several other area women who had qualified for the Miss New York pageant. In February 1979, Friel was crowned Miss New York USA in the Catskills, advancing on to win the Miss USA pageant in Biloxi, Miss. in April. From there, she went on to compete for Miss Universe in Australia where she took sixth place.

"She had the (St. John Fisher) campus and all of Rochester captivated," said Proietti. "Soon it was all of America and even the eyes of the world. She was larger than life."

Being Miss USA was a 365-day-a-year job that entailed a world of celebrities, dignitaries, public appearances, speaking engagements and receptions. Friel campaigned for numerous charities around the world.

As a Ford Model in New York City, she appeared on the cover of Vogue Italia and Good Housekeeping magazine, US, People, Teen Beat and Southern Living, among others. Friel was engaged to the Prince of Saudi Arabia His Royal Highness Lt. Col. Prince Khaled bin Sultan bin Abdul Aziz with whom she attended Prince Charles and Princess Diana's wedding in 1981, and traveled the world. She found herself rubbing elbows with many celebrities such as Frank Sinatra, Mick Jagger, Cher, Elton John, Ringo Starr, Reggie Jackson, Wayne Gretzky, Mario Andretti and Andy Warhol. She dated Julio Iglesias briefly and spent time in the White House during the administration of

President Carter.

"I was never star struck," she said. "Everyone I associated with and gravitated toward was down-to-earth."

Friel credits a meeting with Muhammad Ali in the early months of her reign with teaching her the importance of giving back. It's a moment captured on film. She has the photo framed, autographed and hanging on a wall in her office as a reminder from Ali that says "service to others is the rent we pay for our room in the hereafter," a sentiment Friel has applied to all areas in her own life, and one which she encourages her models to embrace.

"I want the people who come into this agency to recognize that if they're fortunate to become an actor or model with our agency, that it's not just about them," said Friel. "It's important that they really understand the big picture. They've been given a gift. They have the beauty and the talent, but giving back to their community is as important as using their God-given gifts."

Back to her roots

By 1983, having traveled the world, Friel moved in with her parents who had relocated to Philadelphia where she taught at Peirce Junior College in Center City and attended Villanova University. After three years, she decided to take the skills she had gained and parlay them into her own business.

"Money does not buy happiness," she said. "I could not wait to get back to Rochester and settle down. I wanted my little house, my picket fence and my pets and to be on the land that I had bought with my earnings."

In 1987, she launched her own modeling, pageantry and self-development agency, MTF, LLC, specializing in manners and grace for teenage girls interested in modeling and pageantry. When she and her husband Kent married in 1996, he joined her in the business, helping expand the agency to include children, adults and seniors. Modeling is not just for supermodels in New York City, Paris and Milan, she said. Models come in



all shapes and sizes, ages and ethnicities, and from all stages and walks of life.

"It can be supplemental income for seniors or money for college for teenagers," she said. "There's jobs for all ages and both genders. It's never too late to start or too early to begin."

With over 500 clients and models worldwide, Friel has built a reputation for producing top-notch talent and attracting a large client-base. The company provides placements in print, television, film, video, theater, fashion shows and more.

"We have so many major corporations, big and small here, that there's always work," she said. "We have clients that produce work for colleges, banks, tourism, senior living, health care, textile and manufacturing, to name a few. We just got a casting call

from Steven Spielberg.

"We've booked Disney and Nickelodeon from here. We have movies in Hollywood and all over the world and we work with agencies in New York City. We can literally base here and help our people go all over the world, because of the connections we have made."

With clients worldwide, she and Kent work 12 hour days 7 days a week, from sun up to sun down, and often times they work into the midnight hours providing their clients who are located overseas with around-the-clock support. It's not unusual for Friel to leave a voicemail in the middle of the night regarding a project, said Heather Roman, production coordinator for Myers Creative Imaging, an advertising photography studio in Rochester which has been

working with MTF, LLC for nearly 20 years.

"Her work ethic has made her super successful," Roman said. "I know 100 percent when I book her talents that they're going to be ready and on time, and where they're supposed to be."

The Mary Therese Friel way

In the sometimes cut-throat, high-pressure world of pageants, fashion and advertising, Friel expects her models will have their eye on the bigger picture, not just crowns and titles or the bright lights and big city.

"They've got to be well-balanced individuals," she said. "They have to have their priorities straight."

She describes her approach to coaching as conservative.

"I want them to present themselves as ladies and gentlemen so people take them seriously," she said. "There's nothing wrong with reining it in a bit and being discreet. Kids don't need to live in the world of the Kardashians. I want them to have the best of everything real so they can share that with others."

The agency does not take jobs for lingerie, bathing suits or nude modeling. Some might call her old-fashioned. Friel admits she's not the right modeling agent for everyone.

"We are very selective and very honest, so if 100 people come in here, we're going to pick maybe 10," she said. "We don't want it to be a numbers game where we just take anybody. That's another reason we've been very successful."

The Friels have developed a 10-step modeling, pageantry and self-development training program called, "You Can Be ... The Model You" which they use to coach anyone from a stay-at-home mom or military professional coming out of the service trying to reenter the workforce to a higher-level executive looking how to elevate themselves even further. They also coach someone attending a formal event looking for etiquette tips or advice on a new hairstyle or dress. She also does speaking engagements and presentations at area schools on self-esteem and confidence.

"People are being pulled in a million different directions these days and sometimes they forget about themselves," she said. "If you can just



Mary Therese Friel and her husband and business partner, Kent. They have been married since 1996.

grab hold of the idea that you matter and are important, and focus on kindness, helpfulness and respect, you can be the best you can be."

Maria Tyler reached out to MTF, LLC last year for her daughter Elana. Eleven years old at the time, Elana had developed selective mutism, and had only communicated with a select few family members since 2008 when her family moved from Brazil to America.

"Her psychologist told me that

she was happy, it was just her decision not to talk until she was comfortable enough with the language to talk," said Tyler.

Elana had expressed the desire to be a model. The first time she sat down with Friel, Tyler said, to everyone's amazement, Elana began talking.

"From that moment on she began talking to everyone at school," said Tyler.

Now Elana is doing well in her studies and actively modeling with MTF, LLC.

"Elana learned confidence she didn't know she had," said Taylor. "Mrs. Friel taught her how to present herself and how to develop into this wonderful teenager she is now. Having the guidance and positive role model in Mrs. Friel helped Elana blossom."

From real model to role model

Friel doesn't just teach personal development, she practices what she preaches.

"She's a once-in-a-lifetime person you meet," said Jeanne DiNardo Vito, whom Friel coached for the Miss New York USA pageant. Friel now works with Vito's daughter Christina DiNardo, a MTF, LLC model. "She's just got everything going for her. She's definitely a role model for many peo-

ple and she's very well regarded in the community."

The Friels personally and business-wise support many through the agency's annual Comfort Campaign, including Foodlink, The Pirate Toy Fund, veterans, The Open Door Mission, Willow, The Red Cross, Lollypop Farms as well as many others. Cathie Wright, senior director of development and donor relations for Lollypop Farm, said the Friels' commitment to community and the welfare of animals is unmatched.

"Their first and foremost thought is, 'How can we help?' and it might end up costing them money to do so, but it's the right thing to do," said Wright. "It does help promote their business, but it really comes from the heart. They do it because it makes them feel good and it's a really nice way to give back."

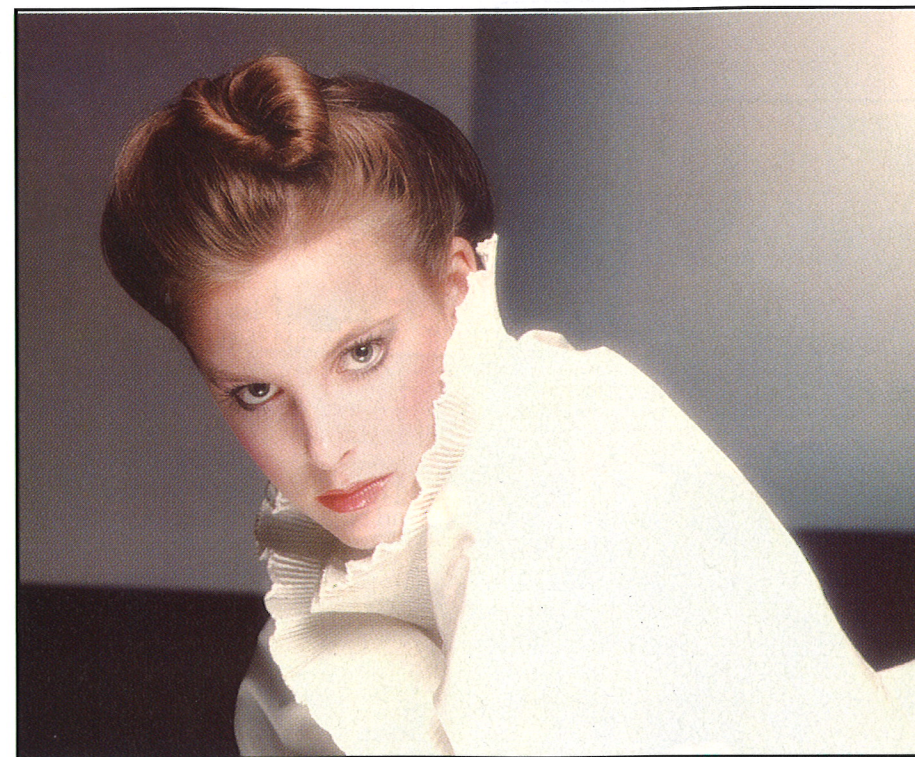
Friel's agency models and actors provide pro-bono work for Causewave Community Partners' nonprofit advertising campaigns and community initiatives, including "Every Minute in School Matters," "211," "Distracted Driving," "Pass Life On" and "Help a Caregiver."

President and CEO of Causewave Community Partners Todd Butler said Friel is a real partner in the advertising industry, giving local talent the opportunity to develop skills and giving local advertising professionals the opportunity to have access to top national caliber talent.

"Mary Therese is just the consummate professional and she inspires that in the people she works with," he said. "It's truly remarkable the seriousness with which she takes these volunteer projects on. Her commitment to her work in her field really adds up to her being an instrumental partner who we couldn't do our work without."

When she and Kent married, he helped her to expand the agency in all ways. The two renew their vows every year. Kent actually took Friel's last name since she had already established a business and successful career based on hers, and he said it was important to him that they have the same name.

"I pretty much see myself as one



Friel during the early 1980s when she worked for Ford Models.

of the luckiest people on the planet being married to her and getting to spend so much time with her," he said.

Between working together at MTF, LLC and caring for their 12-acre farm in Mendon, the two are rarely separated.

"We're two people with different mindsets, but it never gets in the way of working together," said Kent. "When you work together as a couple, you still have to respect and value the other person's opinion and viewpoint, maybe even more than your own."

At home, she and Kent are up with the sun, ready to greet the day. They work out in their home gym and focus on a balanced diet.

"We're just very focused as a couple and don't do extremes," she said. "Kent and I are very complex people but we live a simplistic life by staying focused on keeping our priorities straight."

The couple owns three rescue horses, two dogs, five cats and two fish and is very involved in St. Louis Church in Pittsford.

"I think that my Catholic upbringing really kept me grounded as I jetsetted around the world as a 20-year old," she said. "I had something stronger keeping me balanced."

It also was that moral compass that helped her make some major decisions in life. In 1989, she turned down an opportunity to be groomed and considered for Barbara Walters' apprentice, a childhood dream of hers, and 10 years later, she was offered \$10 million to franchise her agency in 10 different cities.

"I couldn't imagine leaving everything I had just created," she said. "I have people depending on me. I don't feel like I gave up anything because my business is turning 30 years old right now and I look forward to it reaching 50."

The agency recently moved to 20-102 Assembly Drive, also in Mendon. At 57 and looking back at being crowned Miss USA and traveling the world as a Ford Model, Friel said it pales in comparison to all she's learned and accomplished since.

"What you gain from the aging process is so much more understanding, patience, kindness and gratitude," said Friel, who graduated from St. John Fisher in 2004 with a degree in communications and business. "We're on this earth to make the best of every moment and the best of ourselves. We're ever evolving and ever-changing and it's important to have an open heart and mind."

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You Can Be "Be the Best, That ... You Can Be!" by Mary Therese Friel

1. ALWAYS be your self!
2. Care for others.
3. Dress for success, for the job or position you want.
4. Make your first impression your best.
5. Be a good person.
6. Be true to your word.
7. Work hard and aim high.
8. Accept your losses; you can't win them all.
9. Be passionate about what you do and how you live your life; you only get one.
10. Give 100 percent always!

For more information on MTF, LLC, visit www.mtfmodels.com/
or at www.facebook.com/MTFMODELS/