

look

Model Behavior

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LORI MCGINNIS

After growing up in the modeling business, Robin Gifford starts her own business designed to help girls and young women learn poise, etiquette and the world of modeling.

Robin Gifford believes there are teenagers and young women from Lincoln and the surrounding area who have the potential to be successful models. Gifford should know. She was one of them.

Gifford, a Lincoln native, worked as a model in Japan, Paris and New York, then was a scout for top modeling agencies and traveled the world looking for that just right face and body.

Now, several years out of that demanding industry, Gifford has started her own business in Lincoln to help girls and young women learn poise, etiquette and even the world of modeling if they desire. Her business, started last fall, is called Springboard.

Gifford works individually with teenagers and young women and is teaching classes on personal development and etiquette.

"I'm teaching them the basics of modeling," she said. "I'm helping them pull out their poise and confidence, to speak clearly and not be afraid when standing in front of a room of people."

The traits she wants to instill in today's young people are those many are severely lacking – traits like table manners, effectively introducing themselves to people, respecting others and common courtesy. Too often today's young don't learn these qualities because their parents are too frazzled to teach them, she said.



Above: Robin Gifford, owner of Springboard. Right: Pageant contestant Marisa Marsh.

Gifford teaches two classes – one for children ages 9 to 11 and the other for teenagers and young women into their early 20s. The classes teach the students how to make a good first impression, present themselves well and communicate with confidence as well as interviewing skills and table etiquette.

Marisa Marsh, 13, of Lincoln, met with Gifford four times to learn how to present herself well in a pageant. While she didn't win the National American Miss pageant, she said Gifford was a big help.

"I gained so much confidence," she said. "I learned basic skills about interviewing and how to present myself well."

Marisa's mother, Kim Marsh, said the family had been searching for someone like Gifford for three years until they saw her business advertised. After just a few lessons with Gifford, "Marisa completely learned how to model and introduce herself on stage clearly with poise."

"Robin did fabulous," Marsh said. "She was so personal. She made it very fun."

Marisa said she is interested in becoming a model, but for now wants to keep participating in pageants.

Gifford knows most of her clients will never make it as models. That doesn't stop her, however, from keeping her eyes open for those with potential.

"I'm always looking around," she said. "We're in the heartland. We have healthy, beautiful girls here."

Gifford says she would not hesitate to invite her New York modeling contacts to Lincoln to meet anyone she feels has potential. Modeling scouts know a prospect when they see one.

It's a role Gifford played during the early years of her career. She grew up in the modeling industry. Her mother, Doris Oleson, owned two Nancy Bounds Finishing and Modeling schools in Lincoln and Grand Island.

Gifford, then Robin Jones, attended the Nancy Bounds school and did so well that an agent spotted her and sent her to



Japan to model just after her graduation from Waverly High School. She modeled in Japan for two months then spent six months in New York and Paris.

She took a break from the business to attend Columbia University in New York, where she obtained a degree in political science in 1988. Before she even graduated, her involvement in modeling landed her a job as a modeling recruiter. Officially, she was "director of new faces" for Faces Model Management in New York.

Shortly thereafter, she moved to a similar job with one of the top modeling agencies in New York, IGM Models. She traveled extensively throughout the world looking for new models. She wouldn't hesitate to approach a girl in a restaurant or anywhere else if she thought she was model material.

Between 1989 and 1990 Gifford worked as a model editor for now-defunct magazines Taxi and Model. Then in 1990 she became director of scouting for the most prestigious modeling agency of them all, Elite Model Management. She was even featured in People Magazine in 1991 as the top scout in North America.

She rubbed shoulders with famous models and celebrities and lived in the fast lane, spending most of her waking hours traveling. She didn't want the cute, petite cheerleader type, but rather the skinny, gawky girl with big eyes or big lips who was not comfortable with her looks. Those were the ones who had the

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unique look that would make them successful, she said.

She did not hesitate to tell young women that they didn't have what it takes to be an Elite model. She even admits she was fairly brutal with the truth with some model hopefuls.

"The modeling industry is tough," she said. "You can burn out and get down on yourself. You have to be thick skinned."

The fast-paced lifestyle grew wearisome, and Gifford requested an eight-week leave of absence in 1991 during which time she came home to Lincoln. She never went back.

It was during that leave that she met Brad Gifford and they married in 1992. The couple settled in Lincoln and had two daughters. Gifford worked as co-director of the Nancy Bounds schools in Lincoln and Grand Island until 1995, and then got out of the modeling business all together.

A lover of horses her whole life, she became executive director of the United States Dressage Federation, which was then based in Lincoln. She later continued in the non-profit realm, serving as executive director of Martin Luther Homes Foundation and senior vice president of mission advancement for Mosaic.

Gifford's yearning to help young people learn modeling skills resurfaced in 2006, prompting her to start her own business. Springboard is Lincoln's only such business that helps young people learn etiquette, poise and confidence and get over their fears of being in front of people, she said.

"Once they get over that fear, there's something that comes alive in them," she said. "Young people need authentic confidence."

Gifford can be reached at 440-9524 or springboard@windstream.net. Her Web site is www.springboardforsuccess.blogspot.com. L



Robin Gifford (then Jones) models in a 1980s Japanese ad.



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