

Features

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Burlesque dancer likes stripping the light fantastic

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Features Writers

An overzealous barker plied his trade in front of huge paintings of four seductively clad and voluptuous females.

To further entice passers-by to take a monetary interest in "The Burlesque Show," the barker had four very live females dressed in equally seductive garb join him on stage. His encouraging words to the quickly growing crowd were capped with an enthusiastic welcome to view the star of the show, "Ruff Diamond."

Ruff then strolled out taking her place alongside her counterparts with all the glitter and glamor of a burlesque queen. With a sudden turn of her sparkling gown, she disappeared into the tent soon followed by a crowd of aroused and curious onlookers.

After an erotic dance number and four searing stripteases by performers with stage names of Holly Vine, Brandy, Bambi and the Italian Stallion, the featured male stripper, out came Ruff with a bumping and grinding display of how she got star billing.

In reality, Ruff is Diane Carter of Mayport Beach, Fla., and her quiet demeanor off stage was in marked contrast to her enticing act.

Carter and her husband travel with Strates Shows Inc. — owners of the rides and most shows at the fair — for four months a year. When she's not with Strates, Carter dances

in clubs and theaters in Florida, Guam and Puerto Rico under the name "Mystic Blue." She has an agent who books her "all over" and she hopes to go to Germany this winter. The shapely 26-year-old beauty also waits tables at a bar in Mayport Beach.

When asked how she became a member of the burlesque show, Carter said she grew up on the circuit with the Strates Shows.

"My mom worked for Strates and I traveled with the show working games and rides," she said. Carter also met her husband through the Strates Shows; he worked game booths for Strates.

Carter has been dancing with the burlesque show for eight years. She was offered the position as a dancer and became a member of the striptease act. She had already been dancing before the position became open, which might have had something to do with the fact she got the star role a week after joining the burlesque.

Carter said she had no say in her stage name of Ruff Diamond. "Ruff was already painted on the door," she said. "They just told me, 'You'll be Ruff.'"

Val Valentine had been Ruff but, for a reason unknown to Carter, left the show. After Valentine departed Carter stepped into the role and has been there ever since.

Carter choreographs her dances and chooses her own music. "I usually have a band but this week there wasn't one

Burlesque dancer Diane Carter, under the stage name "Ruff Diamond," travels with Strates Shows Inc. and was the featured dancer when it came to the N.C. State Fair.



Staff photo by Clayton Brinkley

so the music had to be taped," she said. She also tapes music for her dances done in clubs.

According to Carter, the burlesque is not exactly dancing. It is a strip show and means mainly "getting the right bumps to the beat."

People tend to be competitive especially when doing the same job and living together. Not so in the burlesque show, according to Carter.

"There's no competitor. It's like one big family. We work together, stay together and go on outings together on our days off," she said.

Carter said there's not as much heckling as one might expect either. Most of the unruly behavior, she explained, occurs on "Kid's Day," when the boys' clubs come through. The majority of the crowds are fairly orderly and appreciative.

Carter likes traveling and working. When the "girlie show" is not open, one can find her working her husband's games. "There's always something I can do. I keep busy," she said.

When asked if she ever wanted to settle down in one spot, she replied, "I'll probably just stay with the show even after I quit dancing."