

Ex-Miss NJ Going for Laughs

By LYNN KEYSER

SEA ISLE CITY — Mike in hand, the former beauty queen, talks about her current life as the mother of two, and gets guffaws from the audience.

Once in a while, she gets a heckler.

Dena Blizzard can handle them too.

Who would have thought Miss Jersey of 1995 would be able to come back at a heckler. But Blizzard says it's her experience as a Miss America contestant that gives her stage presence.

At 22, Blizzard said, she was rubbing shoulders with the governor and other heads of state.

"It was a very maturing experience," she said.

She was also emceeding shows in her role as state beauty queen, and realized she had knack for making people laugh.

And, she loved it.

"You have to love being on stage," Blizzard said. "The money isn't wonderful."

So there she is, every Friday night, at Coffee.COMedy, the new



DENA BLIZZARD

comedy club on JFK Boulevard at the Promenade, wise-cracking about how she's gone from a hot babe to a harried housewife.

Some people might see a disparity between a woman who walked down the runway at Atlantic City's Convention Hall and a self-deprecating stand-up comic.

Blizzard says simply, both are things she wanted to do.

"I watched the (Miss America) pageant as a kid," she said. "I always wanted to know where those girls were coming from."

In her senior year at Rowan University, where she majored in biology, Blizzard ran for Miss New Jersey as Miss Gloucester County. She didn't win, but the following year, competing as Miss Spring Lake Heights, the new college graduate took the state crown.

Blizzard began playing the piano almost before she could read, and knew she had the talent and intelligence to have a shot at the Miss America title.

"I came from knowing very little about pageants," Blizzard said, adding that she learned a lot from people who did.

"When I got there, I found there were women

who competed since the age of 2, but most of them had the same interest and background as me.

"I'd say 95 percent were 'normal,' and five percent were 'pageant girls.' Those five percent made it very interesting for the rest of us."

After her tenure as Miss New Jersey was up, Blizzard returned to Rowan and got a masters in gerontology.

Marriage followed, and the babies weren't far behind.

"I turned 30, and it was devastating to me — two kids and stretch marks," said Blizzard, who has a three and a one-year-old.

As a gift, her husband signed her up for a two-month comedy class in Philadelphia.

Shortly after "graduation," Blizzard was doing guest spots at various clubs. She also performs at bridal showers, where her domestic diva humor finds an appreciative audience.

Blizzard said her husband, a reservist, was activated for a year and a half, and being able to perform was "very therapeutic" for her.

When she first started on the comedy circuit, Blizzard "banked on the Miss New Jersey thing."

Now her routine revolves around kids and marriage. Turning toddler temper tantrums in a mall into a humorous situation, Blizzard feels, is a wonderful way to deal with such stresses.

In addition to her Friday set at Coffee.COMedy, Blizzard also appears at the Comedy Loft in West Chester and at the Comedy Cabaret in Northeast Philadelphia.