

Sun Lifestyle

Meadows Wins As Scarlett's Twin

'Gone With the Wind' heroine look-alike is ambassador of the South

BY LEE KOLB
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For years, Melly Meadows recalls, people remarked on her striking resemblance to Vivian Leigh, the actress who portrayed Scarlett O'Hara in the 1936 movie *Gone With the Wind*, adapted from Margaret Mitchell's dramatic novel set in twilight of the Old South.

The 19-year-old Jonesboro resident became Clayton County's official "Scarlett O'Hara" two years ago when she won a contest sponsored by the county to celebrate the 50th anniversary of *Gone With the Wind*. "A year ago, the county passed a resolution making me the official Scarlett O'Hara," she said.

Scarlett O'Hara's home, the Tara Plantation, was fictitious, but Clayton County is generally recognized as being the locale Mitchell had in mind for the mansion. Being a native of Clayton, Meadows has official claim to maintain Scarlett's persona.

MEADOWS APPEARS AT LOCAL ribbon cuttings, parties and grand openings. "I get into the character and interact with people," she said. "I greet people, ask them if they've seen Rhett Butler, ask children where their pantaloons are. I guess, in a sense, I have become Scarlett O'Hara."

Scarlett's appeal extends beyond Clayton's boundaries, where 'Scarlett O'Hara' represents to many the grace and charm of a simpler, bygone age.

"I have no idea how many times I've been filmed," she said. Portraying Scarlett, she has graced countless newspapers and brochures.

She has appeared as Scarlett O'Hara on *Entertainment Tonight* with Ted Turner, on *The Today Show*, during a segment on the 50th anniversary of *Gone With the Wind*, on *World News Tonight* at the Democratic National Convention, and countless times on local networks filming the grand openings, galas and other events where she appears.

"Word travels fast, faster than I can keep track of. It's getting to the point where I hear about a lot of the different things that come out through word of mouth," she said. "People will come up to me and say, 'Melly, you were on TV last night.'"

As Scarlett, Meadows wears period gowns, those of a 19th-century southern belle. Meadows' mother, Donna, and a friend created her barbecue dress after months of research. "It was done out of love, that was something most moms won't do but I have a very special mom," she said.

Donna Meadows participates in her daughter's career. "I try to be supportive, I act as her manager and do her bookings for her," she said.

ONE PLACE WHERE *Gone With the Wind's* popularity is strong is Japan, where a national fascination exists for things southern.

Recently Meadows was featured in a Japanese documentary of Atlanta, *Introducing Atlanta to the Orient*, produced by FUJI TV of Japan.

"I was doing a shoot with Japanese people who could speak no English besides 'Scarlett! Scarlett!' With some of them, the only English they know is *Gone With the Wind*, she said.

Oftentimes, Scarlett's fame precedes her.

"I couldn't figure out how the Japanese filmmakers found my number in the first place," she said. "When I met them, they said that they had seen me in different magazines in Japan. I'm not really certain where all my face has actually been."

Constantin Chatov, the 83-year-old Russian artist who painted portraits Clark Gable, Margaret Mitchell and did sketches of Vivian Leigh, recently added Meadows -- in Scarlett's regalia -- to his list of portraiturees.

She has modeled an original gown from the movie -- "I was supposed to have been the second person only to Vivian Leigh to have the gown on" -- which fit perfectly.

A sequel to *Gone With the Wind* is now being written. Meadows hopes to portray Scarlett in the movie. With acting and speech training, she polishes her Scarlett persona so that when the time for cast selection comes around she will have a chance to take Scarlett's role.

Meadows is taking voice lessons with Gertrude McFarland, who has trained many of the Metropolitan Opera singers, among them Beverly Wolff, she said.



Vivian Leigh
1936



Melly Meadows
1988



Meadows models in a gown from the movie.

"People are starting to know me and identify me as Scarlett. . . I'm hoping that through all this exposure I will have a chance to be screen tested for the sequel," she said. "I'm trying to get every area covered so that when the sequel does come around, I'll be prepared."

Meadows supplements her film work with modeling, acting, dancing and speech training, in addition to her studies at Clayton State College, where she is pursuing pre-med courses.

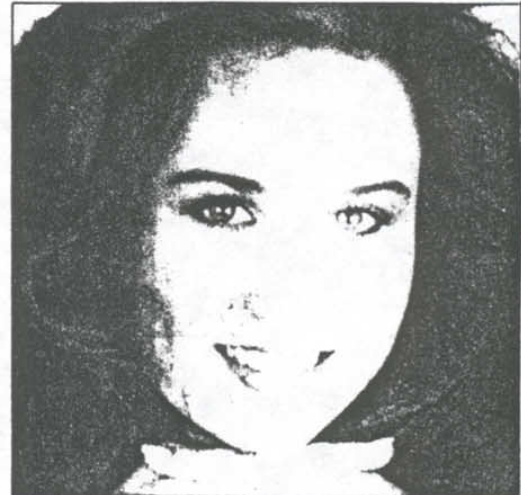
"I've been carrying a heavy load," between Scarlett and school, she said, "but as long as I can keep a balance between the two I'm not going to choose between them."

Meadows has maintained a 3.5 grade point average. With her biochemistry major, "a complete tangent to my other career goals," Meadows wants to get into cancer research and study oncology later on.

BEYOND HAVING SCARLETT O'Hara's role in the *Gone With the Wind* sequel, Meadows said she is unsure what direction her modeling and acting career will take.

"I've done numerous modeling appearances, and now my Scarlett is starting to branch out to where I'm doing acting other than just as Scarlett and modeling other than as Scarlett," she said.

Meadows' schedule leaves little idle time, "no time to be a couch potato," she says. She has friends, a social life, and believes "there's still 24 hours in a day. As long as you can work around that, you'll do fine."



Melly Meadows hopes to portray Scarlett O'Hara in the 'Gone With the Wind' sequel.