

## LOCAL CELEBRITY

## TV's Kathy Svilar doesn't believe in bad days

By Gen Lucidi

Staff Writer

**K**athy glanced uncomfortably over her shoulder, hoping no one was watching as she signed up for a Giant Eagle Advantage card.

Applying for grocery discount cards typically isn't stressful. But, Kathy Svilar wasn't just any shopper. For 20 years she was Shop 'n Save's perky spokesperson whom TV viewers affectionately befriended while they watched Kathy excitedly pitch the chain's run-down of weekly specials.

"Shop 'n Save will always be my meat and potatoes grocery store," laughs Kathy, "I felt like a traitor signing up, but I take my mother-in-law shopping and she likes to go to a nice, convenient Giant Eagle in her neighborhood."

**Kathy's two-decade** reign as the Shop 'n Save lady ended in 2003 when the grocery chain changed its TV advertising direction.

Undeterred, Kathy tackled the impending lifestyle change head on with the same determined, upbeat attitude that won loyal viewers' attention and trust.

"I don't believe in bad days. That's when my Christian faith comes in and I say to myself 'this too shall pass' because whatever the problem is today, it's not bigger than God."

Today, Kathy is channeling her energies on expanding KMS, the advertising business she started 23 years ago. Working out of Media Spot studio in Swissvale, Kathy is writing, producing and starring in commercials that air in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and Phoenix, and promoting everything from cars to purchasing real estate.

**And she's** enjoying home life in Monroeville with George, her husband of 30 years. "I was 19 when we married. He was a black leather motorcycle guy, the love of my life, the wind beneath my wings."

Watching the trim, size 6 bubble over with energy and enthusiasm, it's hard to believe she's 50.

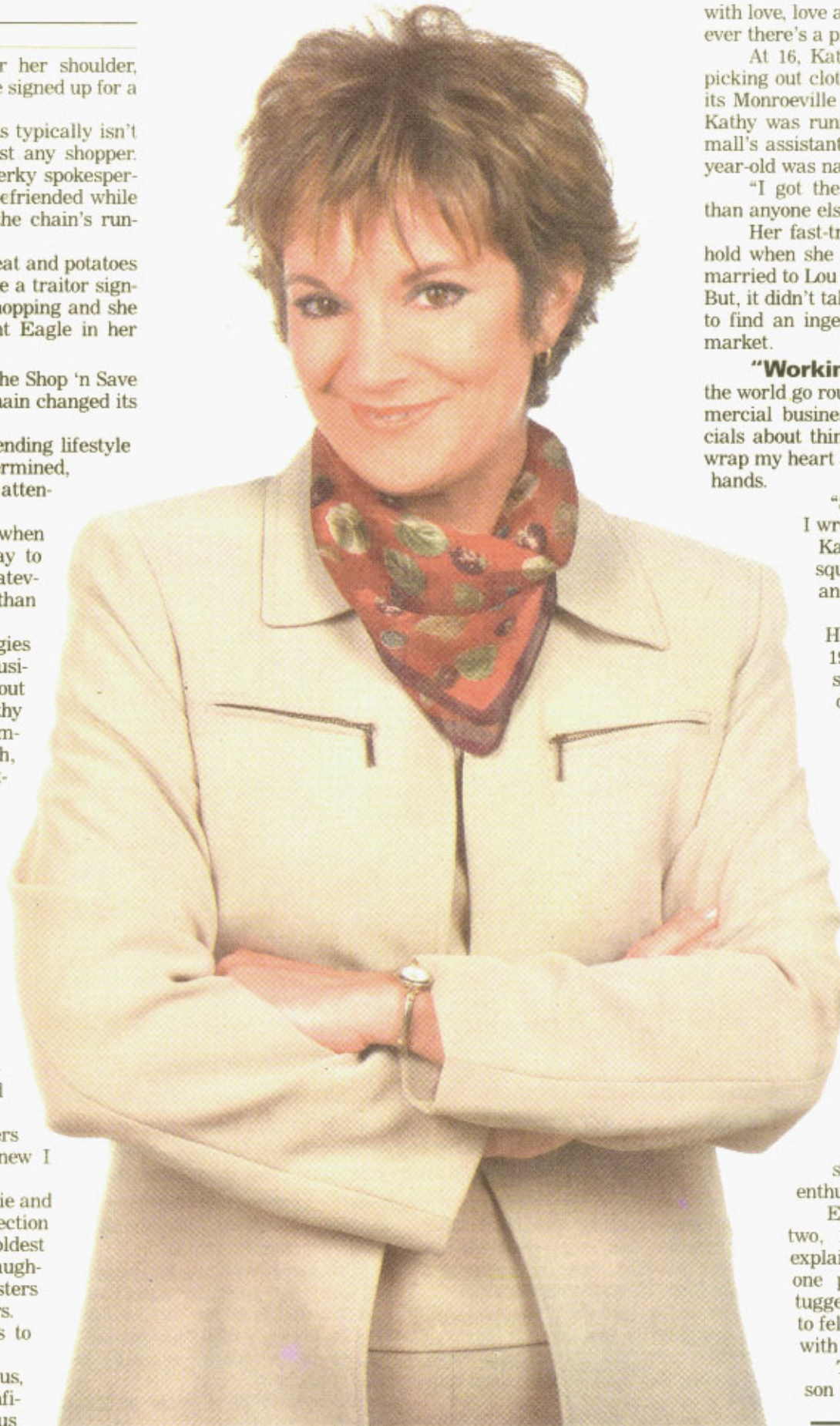
But once Kathy flashes the familiar charismatic smile, it's easy to understand why she achieved her childhood dream of being on TV.

"As a kid, I would watch newscasters and think, I can do that. I always knew I would be on TV someday."

Growing up in what she calls "an Ozzie and Harriet lifestyle" in the Garden City section of Monroeville, Kathy was the second oldest of Norma and Ed McNamara's five daughters. All of the popular, outgoing sisters were Gateway High School cheerleaders.

Kathy says she owes any successes to her family.

"Our parents were so proud of all of us, put us on pedestals and gave us confidence. Most importantly, they raised us



with love, love and more love. We were taught whenever there's a problem, love can get you through it."

At 16, Kathy landed a position modeling and picking out clothes for J.C. Penney's Teen Board at its Monroeville Mall store. By the time she was 19, Kathy was running the board and working as the mall's assistant marketing director. In 1975, the 20-year-old was named the mall's marketing director.

"I got the position because I worked harder than anyone else. I never said that's not my job."

Her fast-track career was temporarily put on hold when she gave birth to daughter, Jaime, now married to Lou Melocchi and living in Indiana Twp. But, it didn't take long for the resourceful new mom to find an ingenious way to get back into the job market.

**"Working at** the mall, I learned sales make the world go round. So, I decided to go into the commercial business. I wrote some sample commercials about things I knew because I always like to wrap my heart around my work, not just brains and hands.

"Since I was changing lots of diapers, I wrote a commercial about Pampers."

Kathy made tapes of the commercials, squirted them with a hint of perfume and sent them to producers.

The catchy promotion got Joseph Horne Company's attention and by 1979 Kathy was the radio spokesperson for the department store's junior division.

Before long she was doing national commercials for Arby's, Chrysler and even impersonating a talking water cooler.

Frustrated that as the talent "you're handed the script and do it even if you disagree," Kathy opted to venture out and start her own business so that she could have more control over her commercials.

**Her big** TV break came in 1983 when Shop 'n Save launched a search for a younger image to replace its then-spokesperson, Jack Bogut. More than 100 women showed up to test for the coveted role.

"I looked around the room and knew I wasn't the prettiest, or the smartest, but I felt I had the most enthusiasm," Kathy recalls.

Each hopeful was asked to pick up two, 10 pound bags of potatoes while explaining that they were a buy one, get one promotion. Kathy grunted as she tugged at the weighty sacks and one potato fell out. Without flinching, she quipped with a big grin, "You get that one too."

The job was hers. As the spokesperson for 120 Shop 'n Save stores, Kathy's

Continued on Page B-2

## LOCAL CELEBRITY



**KDKA-TV WEATHERMAN** Jon Burnett co-hosted an awards ceremony for young people with Kathy in the early 1990s.



**KINGS RESTAURANT** founder Hartley King joined Kathy in sliding into a pool of cherry Jell-o to raise money for the Leukemia Society in 1994. She remembers the plunge as "the weirdest feeling ever."



**MONTY HALL** from TV's "Let's Make A Deal" came to Pittsburgh in 1989 to tape Shop 'n Save commercials with Svilar.

## Kathy Svilar's big television break came in 1983

Continued from Page B-1

commercials were being aired on nine stations, in three states, as much as 150 times a week.

"The commercials were very well received because viewers were comfortable relating to me. I was a mom who sounded like a Pittsburgher and could be their neighbor."

In 1984, that "mom" image was further enhanced when Kathy gave birth to son, Michael, who eventually joined in some commercials as the Shop 'n Save kid.

As the Shop 'n Save lady's popularity spread, so did the demand for Kathy to show up at grocery trade shows throughout the world, as well as at local telethons, churches, schools, parades and community events.

"I made thousands of appearances and tried not to turn down anyone. I never charged because I felt so blessed for the money I was making doing the commercials."

Her celebrity status had her brushing shoulders with countless high profile people. But among the memories that linger most is day that Bill Burns mentioned on air how he enjoyed getting a kiss on the cheek from the Shop 'n Save lady.

"Growing up, Bill Burns was an idol. Hearing him take the time to mention me really was a high point."

Over the years, fans snapped up countless promotional pictures, some of which Kathy still encounters.

"George and I were at a local restaurant when we were approached by a



**KATHY TAKES** a break with her family in the backyard of their Monroeville home. With Kathy is her husband, George, and (from left, standing) son, Michael, son-in-law, Lou, and daughter, Jaime.

waiter who explained that his brother isn't married and every year for the family Christmas photo he holds up a picture that I sent him 12 years ago.

"The waiter said the photo was worn and asked for a new one. Of course, I sent him one and got a great reply. Things like that make me feel very humble.

"I'm grateful for every day, for my

life," says Kathy who happily admits to being "an eternal optimist."

With her advertising business taking off, plus her roles as a motivational speaker and host for the Real Estate Riches weekly radio show on 104.7 fm, what's the articulate businesswoman's next challenge?

"I'd love to do a radio or TV talk show."



**HANDING OUT** dollar bills to customers was a happy task for Kathy as she participated in Shop 'n Save's Crazy Days promotion in 1992.



**KATHY'S ALL** set to tape a commercial in 1987 in the Shop 'n Save kitchen located in Channel 53's studio.