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Lamb Chop to bring smiles to Pasco County Fair

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Mallory Lewis says the sock puppet Lamb Chop was her "only sibling" while growing up.

By WALT BELCHER | The Tampa Tribune

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TAMPA - Mallory Lewis grew up with a funny little pal named Lamb Chop, a sock puppet that became a TV star.

"She was my only sibling," says the daughter of entertainer Shari Lewis. "When I was very young my mother used to put on Lamb Chop at bedtime. I could tell my little sister anything and not get in to trouble.

"Of course, that didn't work so well when I got to be a teenager and tried 'Lamb Chop, I wrecked the car today,'" she jokes.

Although Shari Lewis died in 1998, Lamb Chop and her sidekicks Hush Puppy and Charlie Horse are still entertaining thanks to Mallory, a writer and TV producer who is carrying on her mother's legacy.

"I'm a lot like my mother, I inherited her tush and her voice," Lewis said in a recent telephone interview. She also has her mother's sense of humor.

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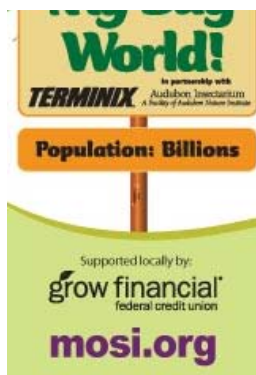
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Mallory Lewis is bringing Lamb Chop to the Pasco County Fair in Dade City which opens Monday and runs through Feb. 27. They will be performing Monday through Saturday at the fair's Back Porch Theater.

"I love to do county fairs because it's an intimate setting with children and adults and that's a perfect venue for Lamb Chop," says Lewis, 47 (formerly Mallory Tarcher). She also tours with the USO and performs for charities.

"Young children are immediately attracted to Lamb Chop and adults who remember my mother begin to recall their inner child and it reminds them of a more innocent time in their lives," she says.

Shari Lewis was a teenager when she first rose to fame on "Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts" in 1952. "Mom was known as ventriloquist but she could sing, dance, juggle and do magic and a lot more – and she was very attractive," says Mallory.

In the 1950s, Shari Lewis worked on numerous New York-based children's shows where she had various puppets. But it wasn't until a guest appearance on "Captain Kangaroo" in 1956 that she introduced Lamb Chop.

In the 1960s, she appeared on numerous TV variety shows and even had her own prime-time series. She also appeared on Broadway and played Las Vegas casinos. "Lamb Chop could do grown-up humor, too," says Mallory (and still does in Mallory's comedy club act).

In the 1990s, Mallory worked closely with her mother as producer of the PBS TV show "Lamb Chop's Play-Along" which ran five years and "Charlie Horse Music Pizza" show. Her mother was diagnosed with uterine cancer in 1998 and died a year later at age 65.

Mallory, who has written more than 20 children's books, says she decided to keep her mother's creation Lamb Chop going because the character brought joy to people.

"My mother always said that we don't aim the humor at children but at the child inside all of us," says Mallory.

Lamb Chop and Mallory will be grand marshals at the Pasco County Fair Parade at 1 p.m. Monday in downtown Dade City. Their performances at the Fair's Back Porch Theater are at 5, 7 and 8:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and at 2:30, 5:45 and 8:15 p.m. on Saturday. (There will be no Sunday performance).

For more information go to www.pascocountyfair.com

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