

# GLOUCESTER COUNTY TIMES

## Swedesboro resident mastered fencing

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Staff photo by Lori M. NicholsJane

One of Gloucester County's most skilled single-sport athletes once thought of becoming a jockey, but at 5-foot-8, 125 pounds, decided her chances were as limited as a hulking NFL offensive tackle.

But 57-year-old Swedesboro resident Jane Eyre — no, not that Jane Eyre — found by accident a sport she has mastered with spectacular results in just 13 years.

The former Jane Rode — yes, that famed Swedesboro Rode family — has become arguably the best over-50 woman fencer in the world, and has the credentials to prove it.

She has been a dominant force in United States Fencing Association tournaments over the last decade, capturing gold medals in a staggering 23 national events. Jane is currently ranked No. 1 in the U.S. in sabre, her specialty weapon, which requires a higher level of speed and athleticism than fencing's other disciplines, foil and epee.

But even more impressive is well-traveled Jane's international over-50 stature. She won the gold medal in 2005 World Veteran Fencing Championship competition in Tampa, Fla. and won her second title recently in Croatia, rebounding from a fifth place showing a year ago in Moscow. Jane also took home bronze medals in 2006 and 2008.

"It's been exciting," Jane says. "I never thought it was possible to have this kind of success. It's a sport that doesn't get a lot of publicity. We compete because we love it."

As a youngster, Jane studied ballet, accruing the footwork finesse she believes enhances her fencing success today. She also was an active member of 4-H who loved to ride horses. Taking a cue from her athletic father, Earl Rode, she was judged best female athlete in the Class of 1972 at Kingsway Regional High School, excelling in field hockey and tennis, the latter her best sport at the time.

Jane entered Philadelphia's Moore College of Art and transferred to Glassboro State College to continue her art studies. Today, besides being a world-class competitive fencer and a fencing teacher and coach (at Moorestown Friends, one of more than 40 New Jersey high schools with fencing teams), Jane finds time to illustrate children's books, observing that "the same energy I use as an artist spills over to fencing."

Divorced, Jane decided to search for an activity that would occupy her time and mind when her son, Josh Tartaglione, departed home for college. She read a community night school catalog, curiously signed up for fencing, a sport she knew almost nothing about, and in short order knew she'd made the correct decision. She was challenged by the opportunity to compete in a "combat sport" and be "mentally stimulated."

Although she has tried foil and epee, weapons that she says require more strategy, Jane finds herself comfortable in the sabre discipline and says it's wise for a competitor to "focus" on one of the three. She discovered that sabre suited her better, observing that "my good footwork is a tribute to my ballet training and is almost as important as the bladework."

Sabre fencers tally points by touching an opponent's body above the waist, like boxers, and are known for their quick-paced reaction. Jane said the sabre weapon is appealing to athletes who like fast results. Sabre points are scored in bursts and are recorded electronically.

"It's over in a matter of minutes," says Jane, who beat her German rival 10-8 in the Croatian international finals, fending off a late rally.

A former jogger, Jane loves to train and practices diligently three days a week. Tops in her age group, she shows no sign of slowing down.

After all, her competitive spirit helps keep her going.

Goals?

"Next year the world tournament moves to Bulgaria," she says, noting a third gold medal would look nice on an already impressive resume.