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By ANITA PHILLIPS

Recorder Staff

It has been a whirlwind four years for Heath native Sarah Banks Hartshorne.

The 24-year-old model, actress and standup comedian, who graduated from The Academy at Charlemont, and not long after became a contestant on "America's Next Top Model Cycle 9," is about to graduate from college with a degree in theater. The spunky, animated brunette currently spends much of her time flying around the country and Europe for modeling jobs.

Her high school sweetheart, Ian Leue from Ashfield, proposed to her in Paris and the couple, living together in Connecticut, are hoping to get married in 2013.

"I never thought I'd have so much going on," said Hartshorne, who in a telephone interview from her Connecticut home last week said that she never planned on auditioning for ANTM until a friend dragged her there.

And that's where it all started for Hartshorne -- sort of.

She said she had known she wanted to be an actress since she was 11 years old, but just wasn't sure how she'd get there. She did a lot of acting in high school and college, but thinking about making the transition to the professional world of acting seemed daunting.

She said her stint on ANTM helped her ambitions, but her journey has also required a lot of hard work. She said that journey is far from over.

"I've been really lucky," said the only child of journalist Stephen Hartshorne of Sunderland and poet Lea Banks of Conway.

She said her family keeps her grounded.

"Sometimes this is so surreal, but then I talk to my family and come back," said Hartshorne.

Her work in the short film, "The 1095 Days," recently won Hartshorne "best actress" honors at the NYLA Film Festival.

"It was 10 minutes of acting, but it was some of the hardest work I've ever done," she said.

Hartshorne has done two other movies, "Queer Side Story" and "The First," over the past few years and plans to do many more.

"I'm hoping that side of my career takes off," she said. "If it does, my fiance and I will have to figure out the back and forth from New York to Los Angeles thing. We're both very supportive of each other and our careers, so we'll figure it out."

Currently, you can see Hartshorne in the latest Palmer's Skin Care commercial, which is being shown across the world.

"My family likes to kid me about it," she said.

Hartshorne stars in the commercial with two other women. Her line, "I

took a stand against dry, damaged skin," has been the brunt of many family jokes, said Stephen Hartshorne.

"We like to tease her -- I didn't realize she was taking such a strong stand against dry skin," he said. "Our ribbing keeps her grounded, though she's always been down-to-earth, so I didn't worry about all of this too much. I'm very proud of her."

Since her stint on ANTM Hartshorne has been acting, modeling and doing standup comedy, another longtime passion. She didn't make it to the seventh round of ANTM, because supermodel host Tyra Banks told her she was too small to be a plus-size model and too big to be a regular-size model, but Hartshorne has defied the odds.

The 5-foot-10-inch-tall Hartshorne said that instead of wallowing in disappointment she felt after she was eliminated from ANTM, she decided to use her time there to her advantage and use what she learned.

"It was a foot in the door, but I've had to work hard since to get where I am," she said. "I have a great agent, so that's been helpful."

Hartshorne considers herself "very lucky." She said she's met a lot of wonderful people over the past four years and that, along with the travel, is the best part of her job.

Images Management and Carson Kolker Org., both in New York, and Brigitte Models Europe in Germany represent the model.

"Working as a model has been great," said Hartshorne. "I've been shooting with one brand in particular and am the face of its catalogue, which is nice."

Hartshorne said she has had to manage school and all of her jobs over the past few years, but doesn't mind.

"I'm doing everything I want to do," she said.

"I recently went back to standup comedy," she said. "I did a lot in high school and comedy has always been a big part of my life, especially my family life."

She said standup comedy is one of the things that has kept her grounded as she gets more modeling and acting gigs.

"You stand up at an open mic to do comedy at a dive bar where no one knows you and you can't help but remember who you really are," she said. "That always gives me a good dose of reality."

Her other reality, she said, is modeling campaigns and photos in magazines, including Glamour and Supermodels Unlimited.

The woman, who is proficient in Russian, French and Spanish, said education has always been very important to her and that's why she has been taking acting, voice, speech and improvisation lessons.

"If I'm going to get really serious about acting, I'm going to get really serious," she said.

She said she will model as long as she can, because, if for no other

reason, it pays the bills, but realizes she won't be able to model forever.

Her goal is to become a full-time actress, and the determined Hartshorne said she will make it happen.

"You have to make it happen, because it doesn't usually just fall in your lap," she said.

Hartshorne said acting is two-thirds talent and one-third dumb luck.

"I've had both," she said.

When she went to the audition for her latest film, she said they were looking for a petite 30-year-old who preferably was a twin.

"I wasn't any of those things and wondered what I was doing there, but I ended up getting the part," she said. "I was up against dozens of other women. You never know."

Hartshorne appeared on the "Tyra Banks Show" and "Good Morning America" after her stint on ANTM. She said she feels relatively comfortable in front of the camera.

What she misses most when she has to travel is her black and white tabby cat, Rue.

"What can I say, I have a connection with that cat," she said.

Hartshorne said no matter where she ends up in her career, she will never forget where she grew up.

"Western Mass is where my roots are," she said. "It's where I became who I am. It's where I got my training. It's where my family is."

She attributes her acting abilities to the training she got at The Academy at Charlemont.

"It provided me the opportunity to learn about all aspects of theater," she said. "I wrote lines, formatted plays, figured out what the essence of certain works was and dove into all sorts of literature to figure out how to present each one. I even helped break down sets."

She said her training in jazz, tap and ballet, belly dance, improvisation and maybe even rifle and revolver handling will help as she pursues different acting jobs.

"It's a funny field," she said. "In no other job would those things matter, but they can come in really handy in acting. They can open doors."

She said modeling is great, but the irregular hours and irregular paychecks can be the worst part of the job.

"You might work 12 hours a day for three weeks and then not work again for three months," she said. "You just don't know."

"That's OK," she said. "I'm not complaining. You just learn how to live that way."

Hartshorne said she has a "to do" list and she'd like to have a number of items checked off over the next four years.

"Hopefully, I'll be married and still be acting, be writing and be doing standup," she said. "But, I'm not making any specific plans. This is the type

of career that can change in a moment. You never know what is going to happen and you just have to kind of follow the path as it comes."

Hartshorne said she is constantly reminded that at any moment, in the worlds of modeling and acting, everything can be wonderful or everything can fall apart.

Even so, she said she wouldn't trade her life for anything.

"When things get tough, that's where the comedy comes in," she said. "That gets me through."

For more information on Harthshorne, visit: www.officialsbh.com.