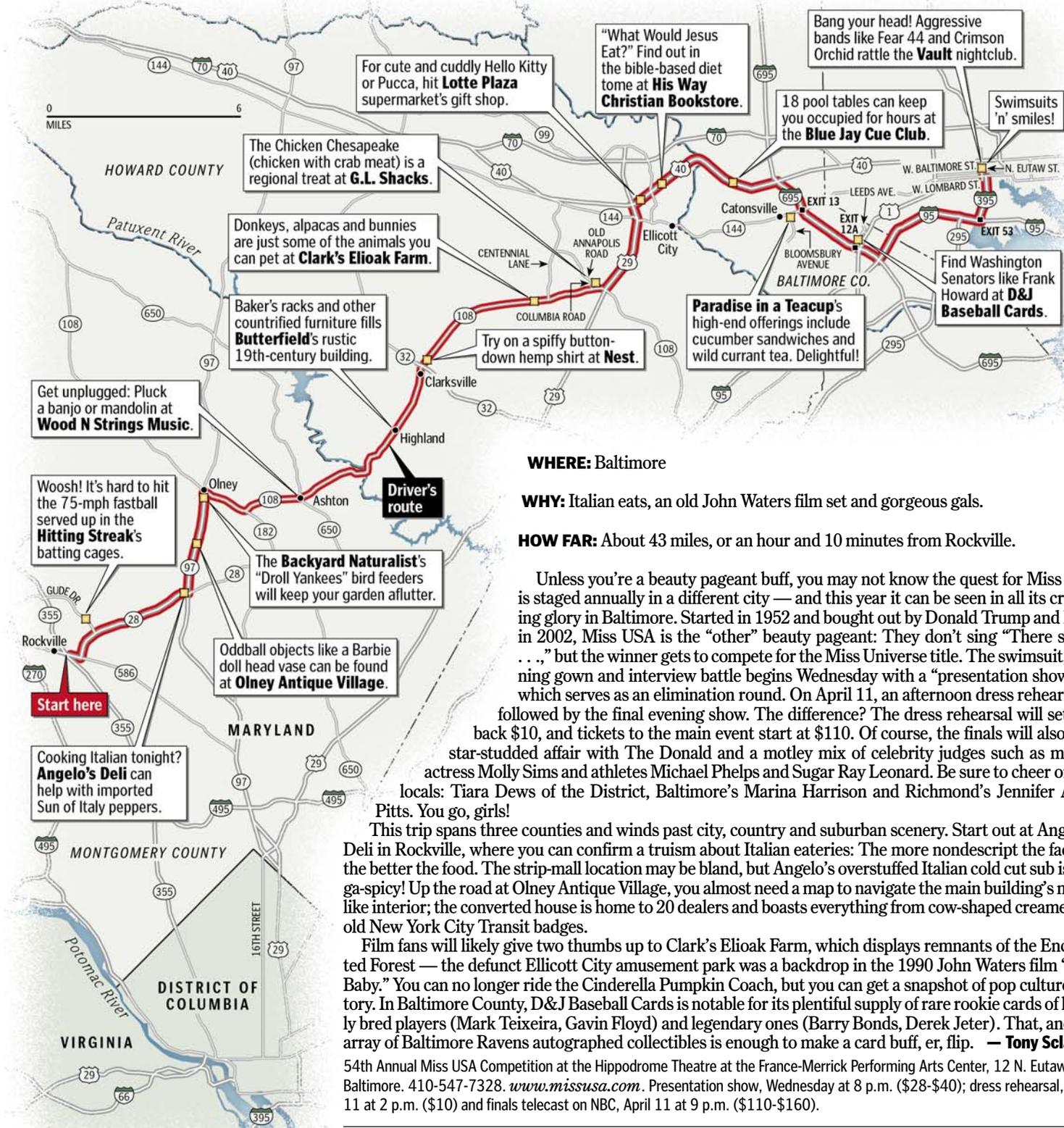


ROADTRIP | Miss USA Pageant



WHERE: Baltimore

WHY: Italian eats, an old John Waters film set and gorgeous gals.

HOW FAR: About 43 miles, or an hour and 10 minutes from Rockville.

Unless you're a beauty pageant buff, you may not know the quest for Miss USA is staged annually in a different city — and this year it can be seen in all its crowning glory in Baltimore. Started in 1952 and bought out by Donald Trump and NBC in 2002, Miss USA is the "other" beauty pageant: They don't sing "There she is . . ." but the winner gets to compete for the Miss Universe title. The swimsuit, evening gown and interview battle begins Wednesday with a "presentation show" — which serves as an elimination round. On April 11, an afternoon dress rehearsal is followed by the final evening show. The difference? The dress rehearsal will set you back \$10, and tickets to the main event start at \$110. Of course, the finals will also be a star-studded affair with The Donald and a motley mix of celebrity judges such as model-actress Molly Sims and athletes Michael Phelps and Sugar Ray Leonard. Be sure to cheer on the locals: Tiara Dews of the District, Baltimore's Marina Harrison and Richmond's Jennifer Anne Pitts. You go, girls!

This trip spans three counties and winds past city, country and suburban scenery. Start out at Angelo's Deli in Rockville, where you can confirm a truism about Italian eateries: The more nondescript the facade, the better the food. The strip-mall location may be bland, but Angelo's overstuffed Italian cold cut sub is mega-spicy! Up the road at Olney Antique Village, you almost need a map to navigate the main building's maze-like interior; the converted house is home to 20 dealers and boasts everything from cow-shaped creamers to old New York City Transit badges.

Film fans will likely give two thumbs up to Clark's Elioak Farm, which displays remnants of the Enchanted Forest — the defunct Ellicott City amusement park was a backdrop in the 1990 John Waters film "Cry-Baby." You can no longer ride the Cinderella Pumpkin Coach, but you can get a snapshot of pop culture history. In Baltimore County, D&J Baseball Cards is notable for its plentiful supply of rare rookie cards of locally bred players (Mark Teixeira, Gavin Floyd) and legendary ones (Barry Bonds, Derek Jeter). That, and the array of Baltimore Ravens autographed collectibles is enough to make a card buff, er, flip. — **Tony Sclafani**

54th Annual Miss USA Competition at the Hippodrome Theatre at the France-Merrick Performing Arts Center, 12 N. Eutaw St., Baltimore. 410-547-7328. www.missusa.com. Presentation show, Wednesday at 8 p.m. (\$28-\$40); dress rehearsal, April 11 at 2 p.m. (\$10) and finals telecast on NBC, April 11 at 9 p.m. (\$110-\$160).

Road Trip maps are available online at www.washingtonpost.com/roadtrip, as are addresses and hours of operation (be sure to check before you go). Have an idea for a trip? E-mail roadtrip@washpost.com.