



**ARTS**  
**Biff ... the Dog**

A Huron High graduate has developed a kinder, gentler, "more tolerant" cartoon character.

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*a* **DOG'S** *life*

Huron High graduate hopes for success with her cartoon character and his message

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 Special to the Register

**SANDUSKY**



**LEFT:** Tracy Calvert holds two stuffed toys representing her cartoon creation, Biff...the dog. The Huron High School graduate, now living in California, hopes Biff and his friends promote diversity and tolerance in addition to achieving success on several lines of merchandise

**BELOW:** Two of Biff's holiday postcards.

Photo illustration/DON LEE from provided photos  
 Biff ... the Dog copyright 1989, 1999 Tracy Calvert



Tracy Calvert's business partners like to say the former Sandusky resident has created the Snoopy of the new millennium.

Since her business partners are also her parents, it's no surprise they are among her biggest fans.

But when it comes to Calvert and Biff...the Dog, they just may be right.

An artistic foray that started out as a birthday card designed during a lunch break has blossomed into a growing business starring a tolerant pup.

Calvert, a Huron High School graduate who now lives in San Francisco, first experimented drawing the pointy-toed tan dog with a spiked collar in 1989. Her colleagues in the art department at the Los Angeles Daily News liked it and one christened him, "Biff...the Dog."

"I've thought about changing the name thousands of times, but a lot of people know him now," Calvert said.

Her Web site, [www.biffthedog.com](http://www.biffthedog.com), has registered more than 22,000 hits, with minimal advertising or marketing -- a fact she finds incredible.

Calvert dabbled with Biff and his group of quirky friends for more than 10 years. This spring, though, she decided to get serious and pursue it full-time.

Her work is paying off.

She officially "launched" Biff and his friends at a gift show in August. She and her parents, Jeff and Joy Berquist of Sandusky, now plan to take Biff to the next level: expanding the apparel, jewelry and greeting card line to include stuffed animals.

And Calvert insists Biff is not just another cute cartoon. She is dedicated to focusing on the diversity and acceptance that she values in her business. Biff is non-denominational and has seven friends that Calvert calls "social misfits." "Acceptance" and "tolerance" are printed beside "Biff...the Dog" on his tag.

"I think ethnic diversity and religious diversity are really important aspects that no other cartoon character has embodied," she said. "I think it's important -- who would have thought that we would be at war in almost 2002, largely based on misunderstandings of religious and cultural differences. If a cartoon character can help people realize that, it's important."

Biff's popularity grew when Calvert began giving Biff T-shirts and cards as holiday gifts. After friends and clients repeatedly told her about the dog's mass marketing appeal, Calvert decided to spend more time on Biff.

She launched the Web site and started producing T-shirts, hats and magnets. Calvert also hand-made clay Biff Christmas ornaments, jewelry and keychains. She's planning a coloring book and is making the final decision on the author of the first Biff childrens' book.

Calvert's parents became her business partners in August, offering capital and business management, public relations and marketing skills.

Calvert just returned from China, where she met with a company that will produce stuffed animals: Biff in three sizes; a flag-covered Biff; and Buny, Biff's girlfriend. She hopes to launch

the toys in January, in time for Valentine's Day.

Biff merchandise is primarily sold in stores throughout California, mainly in San Francisco. Locally, Lake Erie Arts and Crafts Gift Center, Sandusky, has sold Biff T-shirts, hats, post cards and greeting cards for the last four months.

Brenda Denman, manager of the center, has sold a few Biff items, but she said she has great aspirations for Calvert and Biff. "I think it could be really, really big," she said. "It's that unique and that cute."

Calvert is currently searching for a company to sponsor future Biff projects. If her company grows too large, she says, she will not be able to hand-make the jewelry and ornaments. She would also like to create a comic strip and several animated shorts to premiere on the Web site.

Joy Berquist thinks Biff's time has come -- when she walked through the airport recently, she was amazed by the number of people who stopped and asked about the stuffed Biff dolls she was holding.

"He's so lovable," she said. "I think it will work."