

Just for Men

By Tony Burchyns

Until recently, 45-year-old Ron Coury had to swallow his pride every time his girlfriend took him to her salon for a spa treatment.

"It's usually all women, and very uncomfortable," he said, adding because he'd never go in without his girlfriend, "because of all the stares." But ever since his girlfriend introduced him to the manicure and pedicure, he's become addicted to the treatment.

"She said, 'Come on with me, and get a manicure and a pedicure,' and once I had it, I absolutely loved it," he said.

If only there was a beauty salon built for men.

Enter American Male, which opened last month at San Antonio Shopping Center in Mountain View.

With its wooden floors, earthy tones and assortment of sports paraphernalia – such as skis and surfboards – it's not the average salon.

A large TV sits in the corner, broadcasting cable sports, and patrons over 21 are free to order a beer while they wait to have their scalps massaged, their backs waxed, their faces exfoliated or their feet scrubbed.

The rationale is simple: Remove the feminine connotation from the beautifying process and men will be comfortable with it.

"Most guys will say, 'Manicure? That's girl stuff,'" said licensed stylist Paula Alvarado, who works at the new salon. She said a lot of men feel shy when they come into American Male for the first time, usually at the behest of girlfriends or wives. But when men leave they feel enlightened.

"They have this vision that it will be like the traditional women's salon, but they end up feeling really comfortable," she said.

The American Male franchise was launched in 1997 in Reading, Pa. and now includes 14 locations coast to coast. Mountain



View is the first to open in California, more are in the works, co-owner Phil Sacino said.

Sacino noticed a trend in male grooming when he worked on cruise ships and saw men take full advantage of salon services at sea. He also credits makeover-themed reality shows for giving men's grooming a boost.

"'Queer Eye for the Straight Guy' has been a huge influence on a lot of things – the whole concept of makeover," he said. "What is driving people? It's the huge trend of people making themselves over. Look at all the TV shows geared toward that."

For whatever reason, the bottom line is men's grooming is booming. Audits and surveys show the men's market accounts for 21 percent of the beauty industry's \$40.1 billion total – a whopping \$7.8 billion in salon services plus \$650 million in product sales.

On the salon's opening day in Mountain View on Sept. 18, 24 Hour Fitness manager Dan Callanta stopped in to test his mettle in the "pedi-massage-chair." It's like a regular massage chair, but it includes a pedicure basin.

He was happy with what he called a no-fluff experience.

“Definitely, I like the atmosphere,” he said. “You don’t feel it’s a girlie thing to do. You kind of just go in there and take care of business and you’re out of there.”

American Male even goes so far as to assign male-friendly names to some of its services. For instance, “hand detailing” and “foot detailing”: denote manicures and pedicures, and “camouflaging” refers to hair coloring.

Services at the salon range from \$15 eye brow waxes to the \$150 Ultimate Executive package – the works – which includes hand and foot detailing, shampooing and hair styling, and a 50-minute upper body back, and neck massage.

The standard men’s Quality Grooming Experience costs \$49 and includes a warm wax dip that smoothes hands, a mini –scalp massage, shampooing, a haircut, re-shampooing, conditioning and styling.

Aside from haircutting, most of the salon’s services take place away from the front windows, for discretion’s sake.

The stylists are all women and all fully licensed, but so far all the clients have been men, said co-owner Phil Sacino.

As Coury was leaving the salon three weeks ago, he said he had already booked another appointment for early November to receive the \$100 Executive Package, which comes with a 10-minute upper-body massage and a home care product package.

For marketing, Sacino’s relying on word-of-mouth and cross-promotional partnerships with other business, such as the neighboring 24 Hour Fitness. Hopefully, women who take notice will continue to play a role in bringing in new customers, Sacino said.

“The other week, this husband and wife came in, and the wife said, ‘He needs to be smoothed,’ referring to his hairy back, neck and eyebrows,” Sacino said. The subsequent waxing took 40 minutes.

“He said he felt great – that he’d come back,” Sacino said.

“We’ve needed this for a long time,” Coury said.



a full service salon for guys