

The Patriot News

SPAS FOR MEN

Successful salon avoids word that scares men

By Pat Carroll

Like pleats, cuffs and suspenders, the idea of spas for men keeps coming back. But do these two words go together, men and spas?

Probably not.

That men are in touch with their need to be wrapped in a papaya skins and smothered by essential oils is as likely to happen as men in skirts.

Men don't go to spas much, except for massage. They are about 20 percent of the clientele at The Hotel Hershey Spa, and maybe 10 percent at Felicita in Middle Paxton Twp.

"We do get men," said LeAnn Smith, the spa director at Felicita. "A lot of times a man might with his wife, and his wife makes him come."

So with all this male resistance, how is a woman from Reading named Jessica Hafetz making money putting male hands into paraffin hand dips, where the warm wax romances the skin, exfoliating and moisturizing?

Because she doesn't run a chain of spas. She runs a chain of barbershops!

Called American Male, these high-end shops are the brainchild of Jessica's father, Howard, who has spent his life in the beauty supply business. He's a second-generation owner of Raylon Corp., and American Male is now as much a part of Raylon as its Redken hair products.



Here's the family secret for luring men past the massage table into such personal services as facials and nail care:

Never say spa.

"It's the smallest word," Howard says, "but it creates havoc because nobody understands it. Some people think a spa is a Jacuzzi. Some people think spa is the Hotel Hershey. Men are fearful of the word spa.

"The theory behind American Male is we're very spa-like in the way we approach our business. However, we don't use the dirty little three-letter word."

Besides, barbershops have a lot of tradition going for them. Back in the day when a man wore a fedora, he could get a manicure and a shoeshine at the barber's, and a hot towel wrap to relax him.

Today at American Male, the hot towel is on the "Stress Relief" menu along with a facial, a scalp massage and other soothing applications.

So is the paraffin dip, but you don't even have to ask for it. Sit down for your haircut and your attendant will put your hands in the wax, then put a soft pair of gloves so the paraffin can do its moisture magic.

"We do that because we want to them thinking about their hands and their fingers and their skin. But if we ask our clients when they came in, 'How would you like to have a paraffin hand dip?' they'd say 'No, thanks, just a haircut.'"

"We don't ask guys. They'd feel embarrassed, they wouldn't know what it is. We just take their hands and do it, and they love it."

Look around the American Male in Lancaster, and the décor is definitely not femme.

"Our salons look like sports bars with shampoo bowls and stations," says Jessica.

The menu of services looks manly too.

Instead of manicures and pedicures, American Male clients get hand and foot detailing. Yeah, like a car detailing, something a guy's familiar with. Gray hair doesn't get color. It's "camouflaged."

Howard Hafetz has a whole "History of Barbershops" rap, which pinpoints the fatal moment in 1964 when barbering went south. It was, he says, the arrival of the Beatles in America.

Looked at now, those "moptop" haircuts don't seem threatening at all. But back then, barbers saw the end of the semiweekly crew cut. Many seemed uninterested in cutting or styling longer hair.

As a consequence, teenagers saw the barber shop as enemy territory.

"Ninety-five percent of all the barbershops that ever existed in America are gone today," he says.

So eventually, mothers solved the problem by booking their sons at the beauty

shop, where long hair was a familiar territory.

"Guys trust women to tell them how they should look," Hafetz believes.

Which is one reason the AM barbershop in Lancaster is owned by Wendy Farrell. Most of the employees at the Hafetz barbershops are women.

There are 15 shops so far, from Philly to New York to California, and Hafetz opens in Vegas in February. He looks at American Male coming to town as something akin to the first Starbucks coming, a new way to sell a familiar product.

What about Harrisburg?

He's already talking to interested parties.



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