

The Weekly Calistogan

Beauty is a family affair

Julie's Hair & Nails is a six-year-long dream that began in an affordable housing complex

By John Waters Jr., Editor

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Walk into 1067 Lincoln Ave. these days and the first thing you're likely to notice is that the rows and rows of videos are gone, as are the movie posters and counter that once made up the Grapevine Video store.

In the spacious well-decorated beauty parlor, salon, whatever you prefer to call it, you're likely to see heads being shampooed, clipped, snipped and dried in one room and fingernails being shaped, painted and decorated into objects of wonder in the other.

On top of that, everyone knows everyone else. That's because the newly opened Julie's Hair & Nails Salon is a family affair.

But the really cool thing about the spa, according to owner Julie Garcia, a mother of four, is that her new shop is the culmination of a long-held dream of opening her own shop.

"It's a dream come true for me," Garcia said a few days after her March 21 grand opening. "It all started after I moved in the La Pradera apartments."

La Pradera education

Back in 2003, virtually the only affordable housing in Calistoga was La Pradera, a 48-unit complex built by Calistoga Affordable Housing and BRIDGE Housing Corporation.



Calistoga's Norma Guzman (seated) has been going to cosmetologist Julie Garcia for haircuts and coloring for more than five years, back when Julie worked at Fountain of Youth. Now, Garcia, a mother of four, owns her own shop, the culmination of a dream that took about six years to come true. It all started when she was picked to move into an apartment at La Pradera, a housing complex for lower income residents, and was chosen for an education grant.

Once residents are chosen to move into the complex for low, moderate and very low income people they become eligible to apply for one of several grants.

The Alan L. and Ruth Stein Educational Assistance Program awards of \$1,000 to \$5,000 help pay for tuition and other critical expenses not covered by traditional scholarships, such as child care, transportation, books, and supplies. Residents from all the BRIDGE properties apply for the limited funds.

"It wasn't very much money," said Garcia. "But the grant was enough to inspire me, it motivated me, and I set an education goal that I started working toward, and that is one of things that make opening my own business so nice. I'm proud, yes. I worked very hard for this."

According to comments from BRIDGE President and CEO Carol Galante posted on the company's Web site, residents in affordable housing programs "... are tremendously motivated and see education as a key to a better quality of life."

“We are also seeing a ripple effect. Last year’s 13 scholarship recipients have already inspired nine of their family members — children, siblings, spouses, and parents — to pursue new educational goals and enroll in school.”

The scholarship program was founded in 2001 by Alan L. and Ruth Stein of San Francisco.

Alan Stein is managing director of JMP Securities and founding chairman of BRIDGE Housing’s Board of Directors. Applicants, all residents of BRIDGE Housing properties across the state, provided letters of recommendation, financial plans, and essays describing their career goals and personal life stories.

“I was the lucky one from Calistoga the year I was awarded my grant,” Garcia said. “I started out at La Pradera, and my husband and I worked. We had four children. Life was hard.

“Today, my husband still works, I have my new business, and sharing my success by providing jobs for four of my nieces and a new employee, Minty Armstrong,” Garcia said. “Today, we also own our own home.”

A hairy situation

But can Garcia cut hair?

“Oh yeah, she’s great,” said Kyla Terry, owner of 360 Salon, another hair and nails salon in the Riverlea Square at Highway 128 and Petrified Forest Road. “I’ve worked with her a lot over the years. She’s sweet and she knows what she’s doing, and we send a lot of customers to each other.”

For six years, Garcia also worked with the professionals at the Fountain of Youth Beauty Salon on Wappo Street in Calistoga.

“I really got a lot of experience working there,” Garcia said. “They are a great shop.”

When Garcia opened her own hair and nail salon, some of her regular customers followed her to the new digs.

“I’ve known Julie for about six years now,” said Norma Guzman, of Calistoga. She was getting her hair cut on Tuesday. “She just treats me nice — has good customer service — and she’s really special because when I got married five years ago she did my hair and my make up, and I’m still married.”

Along with Julie, those working in the shop include Jasmine Garcia, receptionist and student of cosmetology; Paloma Flores, cosmetologist; Marisela Vargas, manicurist and makeup artist; Koty Guitron, cosmetologist and Minty Armstrong, who is also a cosmetologist.

Mayor Jack Gingles and Calistoga City Councilman Placido Garcia — who is not related to Julie Garcia — don’t work at the salon, but cut the ribbon at the business’s March 21 grand opening.

Garcia’s business is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. They welcome tourists or locals who want a little pampering, Garcia said. They may be reached at 942-1067.

But although Julie’s is the newest in town, other beauty salons include the Hair Spa (for 17 years) at 1422 Lincoln Ave., 942-5341; the 360 Salon (for five years) in the Riverlea Plaza, Highway 128 and Petrified Forest Road, 942-6188 and the Fountain of Youth — which has been in business for a dozen years, 213 Wappo Ave., 942-1095.