**Living the Brand**

**BEN E SALON SPA PAMPER CLIENTS WITH PLANT-DERIVED, ORGANIC PRODUCTS**

Inside the Ben E Salon Spa, blow-dryers delicately buzz, muffling the private conversations between hairstylists and their clients.

It’s the personal relationships with customers that owner Elizabeth “Beth” Koerten likes most about the business. “You’re touching people,” she said. “You can’t help but be close with them, share in their joys, sorrows, losses. You go through life with them. There’s not another career like hair.”

Surprisingly, Koerten is not a hairdresser. She strictly handles the operations side of the business. Her husband and business partner, Ben, is the hairstylist. She said his ability to train young talent drives the business and creates loyalty among its staff. “Our longest-term employee has been here for 24 years,” she said.

Ben E Salon Spa houses under one roof an Aveda retail store that sells plant-derived, organic products, and a salon-spa that provides a full range of services: haircuts, highlighting, color, manicures, pedicures, makeovers, makeup instruction, facials, waxing, organic spray tans, and massages.

Quintessential Barrington recently spoke with Koerten about the highs and lows of operating a business for 36 years, the one trend she is glad went away—perms, because of the harsh chemicals—and a little-known fact about fads that might surprise you: hairstyles don’t change as much as clothing and makeup do.

In the Beginning

The Koertens met in their hometown of Wausau, Wisc., while in high school. Koerten grew up on a dairy farm. Ben immigrated to America from Holland at the age of four, inspired to pursue a career in the beauty industry by a hairdresser cousin.
of his back home.

After marrying, the Koertens moved to Chicago in search of greater opportunities. Beth worked for a CEO in a secretarial position, learning firsthand what it’s like to “hustle” and compete for the top spot in a competitive industry. Ben was a barber before making the switch to women’s hairdressing. In 1980, the couple became entrepreneurs and opened Ben E Salon Spa—a combination of his first name with her first initial—at 123 W. Northwest Highway in Barrington. The couple raised two sons in Barrington’s Tower Lakes, Vance and Ross, who are now in their 30s. Popular with customers, Vance graduated from the prestigious Aveda Institute and works at the salon spa with his wife Brandi, a make-up artist. Ross is a businessman and graduate of Roosevelt University.

In the early days, Koerten said there wasn’t much competition. “Barrington was a quiet town,” she said. “We were almost the only salon.” Now there are at least 30 single-location competitors, including nail shops and blow-dry bars. Initially, the business took up 2,000 square-feet of space at its current location. By the end of the 1990s, it expanded to approximately 5,500 square-feet by filling the vacancies left behind by “Barrington Meat Market,” the dress shop “Nancy’s of Barrington,” and the gift shop “Barrington Sweet Tooth.”

The business, which exclusively carries Aveda products, is an “Aveda Lifestyle Salon.” It earned the prestigious designation from the Minneapolis-based global company for its successful business model and its commitment to wellness, saving the planet, and giving back to the community. “We were looking to be different and Aveda offered a new line of organic, plant-derived products,” Beth said. “It spoke to us.” Since 1999, the salon has raised a total of about $50,000, with its annual Walk-a-Thon at Citizens Park for the Alliance for the Great Lakes (See sidebar, next page).

Koerten credits the couple’s longevity in a competitive industry to never giving up, and always doing their best. “It creates a loyal client who keeps coming back,” she said. The business has served, in some instances, first, second and third generations of families.

Melanie Kalmar is a freelance writer specializing in human interest and business features. When she’s not writing, she enjoys spending time with her family.
Saving the Planet
BEN E SALON SPA PROTECTS OUR WATERWAYS

FOR ELIZABETH “BETH” AND BEN KOERTEN, owners of Ben E Salon Spa in Barrington, keeping up with the prestigious “Aveda Lifestyle Salon” designation comes with the responsibility of living the brand.

“When you have a service performed with organic, plant-derived products, you can feel good about it,” Beth Koerten said.

The Koertens recycle all of the empty plastic bottles generated at their salon-spa and support the alliance for the Great Lakes—citizens who protect and restore our waterways. For “Adopt a Beach Month,” the Alliance organizes volunteers each September to walk the shorelines and pick up trash at local beaches.

“I think it’s very disturbing what goes on in the world today, with greenhouse gases, and plastic bags in the middle of the ocean,” Koerten said. She noted that a big issue now for the Alliance is wind turbines.

Each April 22 for Earth Day, the Koertens and their staff of 20 gather friends and relatives together for a six-mile walk through Citizens Park to raise money for the Alliance’s conservation efforts.

“We take pledges from clients,” Koerten said. “For every five nos, you get some people who give $100.” The Koertens started the tradition in 1999, raising $1,000 that first year, $2,000 the second year and, once, as much as $6,000. In the past 17 years, they have managed to collect about $50,000 for the Alliance.

“The Illinois network of Aveda salons always raises the most money for the cause,” Koerten said, noting the Midwest region of Aveda Salons, as a whole, raised $4 million this year. She explained that the specific environmental project an Aveda salon supports depends on the region they are located in. For instance, the network of salons in California raises money to protect the ocean. In the Rockies, it’s the Colorado River. To learn more about the Alliance or become involved, visit www.greatlakes.org
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**Barrington Holiday Trolley**

**Saturday, December 3**

10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

*Park once and ride the Holiday Trolley to all events!* The trolley will make a continuous hourly circuit, with stops every 15 minutes at the following locations: Village Center, Ice House Mall, Shops on Lageschulte, and The Foundry Shopping Center.

**Beginning Schedule:**

1. 10:00 a.m. - Village Center, 100 S. Cook St. - **SNOW MUCH FUN**
2. 10:15 a.m. - Ice House Mall - **WINTER WONDERLAND**
3. 10:30 a.m. - Lageschulte Street - **MAGICAL REINDEER LANE**
4. 10:45 a.m. - The Foundry - **CANDY CANE FESTIVAL**

*The trolley will leave The Foundry and circle back to the Village Center at 11:00 a.m. and repeat the route until 5:00 p.m.*
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KEEPING UP WITH THE QUOTE, “Creativity is intelligence having fun,” the charming Colored Squid Gallery has opened in Barrington on Main Street. Creator and curator Joyce Younger brings a variety of artisan collections to Barrington in a new and unseen way as a boutique shop. Collections from near and far include one-of-a-kind jewelry, pottery, photography, oils on canvas, linens, wood works, and more. Artists include Susan McConnell with classic fine art photography of Barrington, Chicago and Paris, Aimee Sheeran with oils on canvas, Mable Sinche with crochet work for babies, Danuta Loane with handmade ceramics, and Chris Flannery with paper art.

The gallery store is open Wednesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Thursday evenings until 9 p.m. Colored Squid Gallery is located at 110 East Main Street in Barrington.
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