

ON THE JOB



Mike Hutmacher/The Wichita Eagle

LeAnn Callahan, owner of the Wig Lady, customizes wigs and makes hairpieces for clients with hair loss.

Wig Lady helps clients feel better about hair loss

BY RHONDA McCURRY

The Wichita Eagle

Though she's known as the "wig lady," LeeAnn Callahan might be considered a fairy godmother to some of her customers.

Callahan owns The Wig Lady at 4017 W. 13th St. It's a store specializing in wigs and hairpieces for people with hair loss because of medical reasons.

Nearly nine years ago, Callahan was a salon owner and worked with a client who had cancer. She said the client needed to look and feel good in public so the two went wig shopping together.

"It was a devastating experience," Callahan said. "There was an overall lack of knowledge, low quality of products, lack of privacy, and the whole thing was just uncomfortable."

Once they found a wig, Callahan shaved the client's head then cut and shaped the wig for a perfect fit. The experience inspired Callahan to help others in the same situation.

At the time, Callahan said, opening a wig store was a financially unstable proposition. Still, she opened her shop in 2000 with a 12-wig inventory.

"It was risky, but I knew the need was out there," she said. "I did my research and went through tons of education and training on wigs and hairpieces."

Callahan also built relationships with two cancer support organizations, Cancer Center of Kansas and Victory in the Valley, and asked them to refer patients.

Today, her business thrives on referrals from those organizations as well as dermatologists, psychologists and salon owners.

Callahan worked as a hairstylist for 28 years and specialized in color. She also taught hair color classes nationally for Matrix. She said that experience enables her to help clients find the right styles and colors of wigs.

Callahan not only customizes wigs but also makes hairpieces. Her diverse clientele includes cancer patients, patients with immune disorders such as alopecia and trichotillomania, people who've experienced head trauma from car accidents and also burn victims.

"The greatest gift I can give people is to make them feel comfortable," Callahan said. "Customers who come in are traumatized and scared, and I make them feel better about

LEEANN CALLAHAN

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Business advice: "Find your passion so that you look forward to each and every day. Don't let adversity get in the way of that passion."

themselves."

She remembers the first child she worked with — a young girl who was the same age, height and hair color as Callahan's daughter. Callahan said she remembers that all the girl cared about was looking "normal."

Callahan said it is critical to keep clients' identities confidential. Customers with hairpieces come in monthly for haircuts and color to match their natural hair. Even wigs don't last forever, Callahan said.

"I am lucky that a lot of people are extremely loyal to me."