

The Finishing Touch

Mount Laurel's Beau Institute helps breast cancer survivors feel whole again.

by **MATT COSENTINO**



LIKE MANY WOMEN who have suffered from breast cancer, Paula Johnson didn't feel complete, even after making it through treatment, a mastectomy and reconstructive surgery. The Pennsauken resident still felt like something was missing—the finishing touch to make her feel like herself again.

She found it at the Beau Institute in Mount Laurel.

Rose Marie Beauchemin, a world-renowned expert in the field of permanent cosmetics, started the Beau Institute 25 years ago. An experi-

enced and artistic practitioner, she is also the director of education for her facility and trains surgeons, nurses, physician's assistants and makeup artists.

While Beauchemin's services include permanent makeup, creating simulated eyebrows and scar camouflage, she is also known for areola tattooing, usually for breast cancer survivors. For many women, nipple areola reconstruction is not an option, but the areola tattoo creates a very realistic look.

Johnson is one of the many cancer sur-

vivors to have the procedure done at the Beau Institute—free of charge—and it had a profound impact on her.

"I did not feel whole after breast cancer," she says. "Now it is wonderful to feel complete, because when you have breast cancer it really takes you down. Now I feel alive and whole again, thanks to a simple tattoo."

Beauchemin has seen a trend over the last six or seven years of women opting not to have a nipple graft because it is visible through their clothing, or because they just don't want to un-



dergo another surgery. With the 3D effect she has developed, they can instead have this simple procedure and get a result that looks just like the real thing.

“It’s so realistic that one of the doctors from Cooper Hospital, when she saw one of my clients, said, ‘Oh my goodness, I have to touch it to make sure it’s not real,’” Beauchemin says. “It’s just a magnificent effect. We’ve even managed to create a texture that looks very real. It makes that woman feel familiar again to herself, and it makes her feel more confident.”

Beauchemin says many women go for years without doing this type of procedure because they don’t know where to have it done. A visit to the Beau Institute can be life-changing for them.

“So many women thought they had to go to tattoo shops for this,” she says. “But because we’re artists working on the face and creating eyebrows, we are very good at doing the areola as well.

“A lot of women will come in and say, ‘I’ve never had this done and my husband has not seen my breasts in all of these years because I didn’t know where to go.’ At the time, they had already been through chemotherapy, radiation, surgery and reconstruction. They could not go through one more thing, so the alternative was to do nothing. What we’re trying to do is also reach these women who have been out there for years, as well as the ones just coming out of surgery, who are looking to get completed. We’re going to take care of them.”

Dr. Evan Sorokin, a plastic surgeon in Cherry Hill, has been performing breast reconstruction for the last 10 years. He used to do areola tattooing himself in his office, but now he is one of the many area surgeons who refer their patients to the Beau Institute.

“She just does it differently than most of the other people around, where she uses multiple colors and the tattoos have more of a 3D effect than when it’s done in one solid color,” Dr. Sorokin says. “These women are devastated by the diagnosis, then having the mastectomy and the reconstruction. Once you’ve done the reconstruction as a surgeon, you kind of leave them with these two mounds. Until they really get the areola back, it doesn’t look like a breast. For years, I would do solid color tattoos in my office. Someone like Roe, she’s artistic and she makes it look so much more real. People are much happier with them. She

If you or someone you love is in need of this procedure, the Beau Institute offers it complimentary during training classes and the Beau Day of Hope. Please contact us at (888) 763-2328 for more information and to schedule a consultation.

does a great job over there.”

Beauchemin has taught her methods all over the world and works with some of the leading medical institutions in the country, such as Fox Chase Cancer Center and Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. Her areola tattooing procedures last about 90 minutes and are usually observed by one to three medical professionals or permanent makeup artists learning the technique.

They are completely free of charge during their monthly training classes and annual Beau Day of Hope, and private appointments are available upon request. Beauchemin also donates permanent eyebrows to many breast cancer organizations for their events, since a woman’s eyebrows rarely grow back following chemotherapy.

Because Beauchemin has been working with breast cancer patients for so long, coordinating with charitable organizations and trying to fight the disease is something she takes seriously. “I will leave these cancer institutions and my world is rocked, because the numbers are so huge,” she says. “the emotions that these women go through are nothing that can be imagined unless you go through it yourself.”

Yet she finds herself inspired by the strength of these women on a daily basis. That’s why she finds it so rewarding to give back to them in any way she can.

“We see a lot of women who have had a beautiful surgery,” Beauchemin says. “But that woman doesn’t see it, because all she sees is this blank canvas that looks odd. In her mind, she looks disfigured. But when you put the areola on and do the 3D effect, they literally stand up and cry. So we love being able to do this and give her something back that she lost in the journey. It’s the finishing touch.” ■



Rose Marie Beauchemin with Danette Loney, a breast cancer survivor



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