

## IN BUSINESS

# Hampton Court: A cooperative making the cut and then some

by **ELIZABETH D. THOMPSON**

*Times-Tribune*

For better or worse, cooperatives are uniquely dependant on the people who run them. Without a set of skilled, dedicated people involved, a business model based on a delicate combination of teamwork and independence can easily fall apart.

But with the right people behind it, a cooperative can thrive. Such is the case with Hampton Court, an eclectic salon here in Middleton.

When you combine their experience, Hampton Court's cosmetologists have been styling and coloring hair, waxing eyebrows, shaping nails, and performing massages for over a hundred years.

Each person at Hampton Court rents his or her own booth and equipment, right down to the chair, and runs a separate microenterprise.

It was not always so. Hampton Court has existed in Middleton for close to thirty years. In 1979, it became an established business near Scott's Pastry Shoppe. According to partner Kris Cuccia, she and Leslie Vanko bought Hampton's in 1983 and in 1992, moved it to its current location at 6771 University Avenue. In

1998, they closed out the business, turned it into a booth rental cooperative, and took on Debbie DesMarais as a third partner. Current business owners within Hampton Court also include Sandy Rundle, a stylist, and Anita Bemis, a nail technician and massage therapist. In the near future, Ann Gibneski, a fellow stylist, will join them.

While youthful in heart and appearance, they've been involved with cosmetology for a long time: DesMarais

for 18 years, Gibneski for 25, Vanko for 31, Cuccia for 30, Bemis for 19 years and Rundle for 33.

Styling and cutting hair runs in their blood. Gibneski's grandfather was known as the Barber of Paoli, Wisconsin. She quips about how in high school she did everyone's hair for the dances but never had time to do her own. Bemis started out by cutting her own kids' hair and then was approached by more and more people asking her to cut theirs. Rundle, who still does shampoo-sets, (considered an art form and a rarity these days), confesses that as a child she did her doll's hair. Early on in life, Vanko - whose parents styled hair - wrote a career report in the eighth grade about being a beautician. DesMarais' parents and sisters have at one time or another cut and styled hair. Regarding hair, fate, and career she jokes, "it's in the family and we can't get out."

In the new millennium, strict guidelines govern who can call themselves a cosmetologist and a business/salon owner. A common misconception is that people don't have to have a

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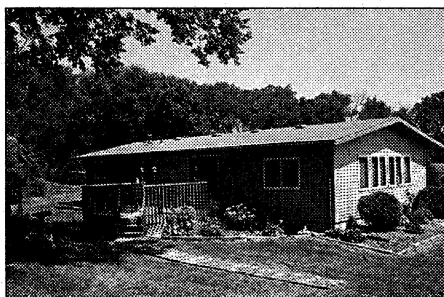
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**CO-OP**

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**Pictured from left to right are the women behind Hampton Court salon: Ann Gibneski, Kris Cuccia, Sandy Rundle, Anita Bemis, Leslie Vanko and Debbie DesMarais.**

vacation or sick days, lots of paperwork, and the weather can be a villain. To paraphrase one team member, "If people call in sick, I don't mind because it keeps the germs from traveling into the salon and infecting us and other customers, but when people cancel because of an inch of snow, they may not be aware of how it impacts us. There's no hourly wage

here."

On the other entrepreneurial side of the coin, team members agree that renting a booth has advantages over running a salon. These include paying only self-employment tax as opposed to employee benefits, choosing their own product line and being able to set reasonable rates while remaining competitive within the market.

"With us, there's no middleman and no overhead with splashy ads in the phone book or billboards," says DesMarais. "That savings gets passed on to the customer."

She adds, "We also have a lot of fun together...we don't have a cattiness that some big salons have and that's really nice."

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license to style hair. In fact they need two, DesMarais explains. A practitioner's license to work with hair or hair removal and a manager's license combined with an establishment license to run a booth. After going to school and graduating, a cosmetologist applies and tests for a practitioner's license. Following that, they must work as a stylist for at least two years before applying for a manager's license. In addition, cosmetologists must be covered by their own liability insurance and usually update their education by attending conferences across the country. While the latter is not yet a law, all the cosmetologists at Hampton's expect it may be a requirement in the future and pay out of pocket to attend these conferences every year so they can best serve their customers.

both advantages and disadvantages, they explain. Being the boss and booking their own hours is an advantage.

Each beautician has a separate phone line and can ultimately decide how many hours she works and when. Like other business owners, they work long hours to make a decent living and keep ahead of expenses. "We don't have to answer to anybody, but we also probably work ten times harder than if we did for somebody else because it is for ourselves," says DesMarais.

There are other benefits that go with working at Hampton's. The group is quick to point out how loyal clients are. Vanko shares that there's also a fun and relaxed atmosphere within the cooperative and relatively low turnover.

On the downside, there's no paid

Working for the cooperative has