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Hairstylists roll into clients' homes

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CHENEY – At an adult family home on Spokane's South Hill, Patty Stiffler unwinds the rollers from the hair of 90-year-old Helen Douthit, who sits in a wheelchair as they chat about "The Family Feud" on the TV in the living room.

Stiffler, the owner of Rollers Mobile Hair and Nails Inc., has been a stylist for 22 years. In 2004 she decided to shift her Cheney salon to an exclusively mobile business, bringing her services to the clients.

"I knew there was a need," said Stiffler. "It's really fun to be out and about instead of stuck in one place all of the time." Most of her clients are elderly or disabled, but she will drive to anyone who needs her care. Services range from haircuts, coloring and permanents, to pedicures and nail trimming for diabetics, done with sanitized and sterilized tools.

The business has been expanding, so two months ago she hired another licensed stylist to help, Brigid O'Hara, who passed Stiffler's requirements for talent and customer compassion. They both had background checks, and are bonded and insured. "I wanted people to be able to trust us," said Stiffler.

O'Hara said she doesn't touch any of the clients' belongings. "I just try to make my personal presence very calming," she said.

Both stylists have worked in private homes, adult family homes and hospitals. Stiffler's latest hospital case was a woman who had been a client on a regular basis. On the final visit, Stiffler shampooed and styled her hair. She was bed-ridden, unable to move without pain, wearing an oxygen mask and unable to talk. Stiffler used a shampoo bonnet that she warmed up and put on the woman so she could clean her hair.

Stiffler said she knew that she had made her client happy, "She held my hand and looked at me, and I could tell she was thanking me. I said, 'I love you, Dorothy.'" The woman died a couple of days later.

"I would want someone to do that for me if I needed it done," Stiffler said.

Ruby Coller, 80, who has been a client for over a year, thinks Rollers is a great service for someone like her, since she has a handicap. "They're efficient and friendly and always do wonderful work."

Services provided in a client's home are necessary for many of her customers. "Some have dementia, or Alzheimer's, or they're hurting. I try to make them laugh and feel good, because they're sitting in their house thinking of their ills," Stiffler said.

The mobile service has worked well for families with little children who have everyone cared for in one visit. Stiffler said she has also worked for a couple of agoraphobics who didn't want to leave their house. Customers' reasons for home service vary. "Some just flat-out don't like going to a salon," Stiffler said.

Rollers leads Stiffler and O'Hara to travel all over the Spokane region providing for their clientele: north to Deer Park and Colbert, south to locations down Highway 195, east to Liberty Lake, and west to anywhere on the West Plains. Soon, Stiffler hopes to expand into Coeur d'Alene with the help of O'Hara, who has her Idaho license.

Both stylists said they love their job. According to Stiffler, "We believe it's not what you do; it's how you do it. And we do it with compassion and caring."



Hairdresser Patty Stiffler works on the hair of Darlene Chaney at a care home in Spokane Valley last month. Stiffler's mobile beauty service visits care facilities, hospitals and homes. The Spokesman-Review (JESSE TINSLEY The Spokesman-Review)

Rollers Mobile Hair and Nails*Web site:*www.rollershairandnails.com*Phone number:* (509) 990-6139*Some services and current prices*

Haircut: \$25

Shampoo and set: \$23

Permanent and cut: \$65

Permanent, cut, style: \$70

Coloring: \$40

Manicure: \$20

Pedicure: \$38