

Business Spotlight Empire Beauty Schools

Every business has a story and something that makes them a little special. Empire Beauty Schools has a long history, many stories, and although the 89 year old founder, Norman Langlois, spends most of the year in Florida he remains actively involved in the business. It is Norman's work ethic, beliefs and community involvement that built a beauty empire that now spans from Maine to Florida.

Norman began his career as a machinist, the trade he learned in the Navy. He didn't like it and decided to enroll at the local beauty academy. With his new skill and a \$1,000 loan from a friend he was soon in business as the owner of Norman's Hair Styling. Over the years he opened additional salons, a beauty supply company and four beauty schools. The companies grew and at one point employed 1000 people. Norman eventually decided to focus his energy on the schools helping more young people find success in the beauty industry.

John Bentley initially worked for Norman in the 1980's as a sales rep for his beauty supply company. He eventually moved on but stayed in touch with the family and returned to the company two years ago as their Director of Operations. John and his seven fellow corporate staffers may only see Norman regularly during the summer months but a little geographic distance doesn't keep Norman out of the loop. When he is in New Hampshire you will often find him at one of the schools mentoring students and quizzing them on which skill is the most important to master. According to Langlois it is people skills.

The industry has evolved and the 25 pound stack of books typically lugged around by students has been replaced with fully loaded ipads. New products and techniques abound but what makes these schools special is their student-centered focus. Actually, there are no students at Empire Beauty School. Instead they enroll Tomorrow's Professionals, fondly referred to as "T.P.'s". The instructors go beyond teaching technical skills and impress upon the T.P.'s the importance of learning successful habits. Life skills and work ethics are engrained in Tomorrow's Professionals to help them flourish in their post-graduate careers.

Running a beauty empire does have its challenges. The industry is highly regulated and has to follow the rules and regulations set by the state of New Hampshire, the Department of Education and a national cosmetology association. That can't be easy. A less obvious but real challenge for some of Tomorrow's Professionals is a lack of support at home. According to Bentley, too many of his T.P.'s deal with issues that make succeeding at school that much more of a challenge. "It's tough to see and we truly care but we are limited in what we can do for them."

Some students may have other challenges to overcome but it doesn't stop them from getting involved in their communities. The Caring and Sharing program is an important part of the company's core and happens year round at all of the schools. Each month a charitable event takes place, some chosen by corporate but most chosen by each individual school. Money is raised for everything from the Food Bank to breast cancer research to the SPCA. Often these funds stay in the local community providing a helping hand to neighbors in need. Any day of the year Veterans can walk into any of the schools and receive a free haircut, another fine example of the company's commitment to give back.

Of course it feels great to see revenue grow, new facilities open and graduation rates rise. Every business wants to succeed financially but the figures that bring real joy to the leadership are the growing number of success stories. Joy comes from seeing the excitement in a student who just mastered a new skill or a returning graduate sharing their success story with the incoming class.

Future plans include growing the programs offered at the four schools. Three of the schools have added aesthetics and massage therapy training is on the horizon. One change you won't see is a divergence from their focus on the community and Tomorrow's Professionals.

You can visit their new facility at 456 High Street in Somersworth or check them out at www.empirebeautyschools.com.