Award-winning salon fulfills entrepreneur's dreams, receives national recognition

By Karen Beardslee Kwasny

When Sharon Smith opened RayzTanning, she had a dream and vision: to be the proprietor of one of the most elegant, unique, convenient and safe tanning salons around.

Last year, when her salon had been open for barely two years, she knew she had attained that dream – *big time.*

Sharon's salon was featured in *Today's Image*, the major national resource for professionals in the indoor tanning business, as one of five national finalists in the magazine's Salon Décor/Salon Image competition.

"I'm so proud that we were singled out from more than 100 entries," Sharon says with a smile. "This proves to me that I've succeeded in achieving what I'd dreamed of and wanted RayzTanning to be."

A graduate of Tidewater Community College with a degree in business management, Sharon spent the first 20 years of her career in publishing, but she always knew she wanted to own a business. And when her daughters, Kristin and Holly, left the nest to start their own lives, she knew it was time to take flight herself. With the help of her husband, Bill, owner of Stone Mountain Flooring and Carpet World, Sharon did just that.

Because Sharon knew exactly what she wanted to do as an independent business owner, it was easy to focus on what it would take to get her there. First, she had to find out what made other top-notch salons across the country so special. So, from 2002 until 2004, Sharon and Bill spent their vacation time visiting salons in New York and Dallas, in Houston and Los Angeles and then some, searching for just the right ingredients for Sharon's place.

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"We did a lot of research for Rayz Tanning," Sharon recalls. "I would go into a salon and pick the owner's brains for information about what made them unique. From the look of the salon to the type of beds used, I wanted to know what I could do to set my salon apart from the rest."

By the time Sharon and Bill finished their cross-country research, Sharon had developed a vision for her salon. It would be luxuriously tropical and welcoming, home to only the very best tanning equipment available. Her staff members would all be smart-tan certified by the International Smart Tan Network and, because of that training, capable of helping clients determine the best tanning plan for their type of skin. There would be three licensed massage therapists on hand, offering everything from deep tissue to hot stone and reflexology. Cleanliness and friendliness would abound and attention to detail would be a top priority.

"Everything here was painstakingly thought out," Sharon explains, as she gestures to the jewel-tone walls and lovely decorative touches. "I wanted it to be the kind of salon people enjoy for a variety of reasons, a place they look forward to visiting for tanning and relaxing. All we do here has that idea behind it."

It's no wonder that Rayz Tanning placed in the top five salons in a national competition based on a tanning salon's decor and image. Owner Sharon Smith has created a tropical paradise, lush with beauty and infused with tranquility.

From the balmy atmosphere of the entryway to the secluded quiet of the massage therapy room, Rayz offers nothing but comfort and pleasure and the highest quality, state-of-the-art tanning units available today.

"We take great pride in choosing only the most reputable brand beds for our clients," Sharon says. "All our beds are premium, high level Ergoline beds with facial tanners and variable speed fans. With these units, our clients need tan for only 15 minutes at a time in any twenty-four hour period. And we keep close tabs on this through our computer system so that there's no over-tanning or risk of burning."

Clients can choose the tanning program that suits their schedule and their skin type. They can tan during lunch break, before work, after work, or late into the evening. They can do it lying down or standing up, by ray or by spray.

For the deep, dark tanner, there's the High Pressure Matrix bed, a unit that filters out all UVB rays, letting in only UVA for a deep dark tan that can be maintained through once a week visits after the desired base tan is achieved. Lunch hour tanners lean toward Rayz' Stand-Up Lounge, an 8 minute maximum, 180 watt unit with a high velocity fan for cooling and a private dressing area for convenience.

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Then there's Rayz Mystic Spray Booth, a celebrity favorite, endorsed by the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders. Developed by Troy Cooper, a Dallas-based engineer, the Mystic Spray booth offers instant tanning gratification: in less than a minute, clients can get a golden tan that appears in hours and fades away naturally in five to seven days.

"This unit is a real source of pride for me," Sharon remarks. "It's the best you can buy in Magnetan technology, a patented process that uses the body's natural magnetic properties to attract the tanning mist to the surface of the skin. Through this process, clients get an even, no-streaks natural-looking tan. The results are unbelievable and beautiful."

This summer Rayz will be celebrating its third successful year in business. And Kristin Reynolds, Sharon's eldest daughter and the salon's manager, believes the best is yet to come.

"It would be nice to think we've thought of everything when it comes to fulfilling our client's tanning and comfort needs," Kristin explains. "But we're always coming up with new ways to make them happy while they're here. We keep a suggestion box in the complimentary vanity area so that clients can give us input and someone is available at all times to help if there's anything they need."

From the beginning, Sharon set out to create a very special tanning salon. It was her dream that Rayz would be the kind of place clients would keep coming back to time after time after time. Today, Rayz' website is chock full of glowing testimonials, making it clear that Sharon's clients have a darned good reason to leave the overloaded beach bag behind.

"Our clients come in ready to look and feel better and when they leave, they do," Sharon says with a smile. "That's what I wanted from the start and I love knowing we're making it happen."

Rayz tanning

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