





# A cut above

Janet West began her career “behind the chair” as a hair stylist, but her entrepreneurial spirit has catapulted her into one of the area’s leading businesswomen.

STORY BY MARY ANN DESANTIS PHOTOS BY JAMES GIBSON

With four salons and a cosmetology school to run, Janet West's days are full. Many people would find the stress of operating multiple businesses overwhelming, but Janet's easy smile and calm demeanor prove otherwise. She truly enjoys her role as president of Shear Express, Inc. (SEI), and thrives on managing and growing the business she began in 1986 in The Villages.

"I love this fun and exciting industry," she says, "and I enjoy working with creative people, which I get to do every day."

Janet owns four salons around The Villages: Argo Hair Company in Spanish Plaines, Dimensions Hair Studio in Colony Plaza, Root 466 Salon in Southern Trace Plaza, and Leslijon Salon in the Rolling Acres Plaza. In addition, she founded The Salon

"We knew other salons had challenges recruiting qualified stylists," says Janet. "We wanted to make a difference by graduating students who are solid and grounded and know how to communicate with clients. They will be an asset to any salon they join."

Janet and her team of educators also make students aware of the many opportunities that exist in the hair industry besides being behind-the-chair stylists. Some academy graduates and SEI salon professionals have gone to work for distributors, as salon owners, as platform artists for large manufacturers, and even as educators at the academy itself.

"Janet took me in when I was 18 as a stylist at Argo, and it was a constant push from day one... from how I dressed to how I applied my make-up,"



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Professional Academy nearly five years ago.

Managing the growth is a challenge, she admits, especially when it comes to recruiting enough professionally trained stylists for her fast-growing salons. She saw others in the industry were having the same difficulty finding salon professionals.

The timing was right for her to branch out into the academic realm and create The Salon Professional Academy. Last year, the school became accredited by the National Accrediting Commission of Cosmetology Arts and Sciences, which enabled students to be eligible for government-backed student loans and financial aid as well as for Florida's Bright Futures scholarships. Enrollment exploded from 12 students when the academy began to now more than 200 students a year.

says April Dickens, who has been director of education at the Salon Professional Academy for more than four years. "Janet has the amazing ability to see within you deeper than you can see within yourself, and once she sees it, get ready."

## CONTINUING TO GROW

Janet began "behind the chair" herself more than 25 years ago. A native of Michigan, she attended Ferris State University and received her cosmetology license and an associate degree in applied sciences at the same time. Shortly later, she was on her way to the South with a new husband and a new career.

"Mike and I got married on a Saturday at 4 o'clock and drove to Florida on Monday," she says with a smile. "I started as a stylist/manager at Shear Madness, and my entrepreneurial spirit and good fortune led me to later buy it."

Indeed her entrepreneurial spirit has been a cornerstone for her success. She has bought and sold several other salons in the area, and employees have gone on to become partners at SEI. Her enthusiasm for the salon business is contagious, and she believes that education should never stop. Stylists at her salons attest to the many development opportunities they are given.

She believes the continuing education and advanced training her stylists receive are what set her salons apart from others in the industry. Recently, all her salons closed for a day so stylists and academy educators could train with industry leader Michael Cole, who develops nationally recognized personal and professional training programs for salon professionals.

"You have to continually educate and reinvent yourself," Janet says. "I'm still learning every day. It's very rewarding to be able to pass along your experience and knowledge to the next generation."



For Janet, that next generation also includes her son Parker, 21, who graduated from The Salon Professional Academy and now styles his mother's hair. She describes her time in his chair as fun, relaxing and being each other's "captive audience."

"He grew up in the salon business," she says proudly. "On weekends, he would help me clean or sweep hair and by the time he graduated high school he had worked the front desk. He knew what he wanted to do."

She and Mike have two other sons, Zachary, 19, a student at Universal Technical Institute in Orlando; and Wyatt, 12, a sixth-grader at The Villages Charter School.

With three active boys, it's no surprise Janet and her husband spend time in the outdoors, especially

## still learning every day."

fishing near Homosassa Springs. This summer the family will take to the road in a new motor home, a purchase prompted by son Wyatt's love for camping.

"We still have the comforts of home when we travel," she says with a laugh. "We plan to drive it to Michigan, which will be our biggest trip so far."

### DOING OUR BEST

What do the next 25 years hold for Shear Express and Janet? She looks at large salon groups that have 40- or 50-year histories and hopes to create that sort of legacy for SEI.

"We have a solid foundation and strong core business," she says. "We want to build on that because we realize our employees and their families depend on us."

She adds that growing and developing people is absolutely essential for any business that wants to survive.

"My salon partners are owners alongside me," she says. "I've always tried to surround myself with smart people and collectively we've been able to achieve more together."

Her immediate goals do not include opening another salon, but with a sly smile she adds, "Never say never."

Her mantra is "earn a great living while enjoying life." She loves to travel and her bucket list includes trips to Paris, Hong Kong, and "perhaps Africa" someday. In the meantime, she's content to spend time with family and friends and to continue building on the success that SEI has had over the past 25 years by sticking to its core principles.

"We do hair in The Villages... and that's what we do best," she says.



QUAN.	DESCRIPTION	PRICE	AMOUNT
1			
2			
3	HAIRCUTS - 5,649		
4	COLORING - 3,575		
5	NAILS - 1,409		
6	STYLING - 1,144		
7	CONDITIONING - 1,123		
8	HILITES - 759		
9	*HAIR TREATMENTS - 592		
10	WAXING - 578		
11	PEDICURES - 459		
12	SKIN CARE - 388		
	*PERMANENT MAKEUP - 98		
	PERMS - 98		
	*MASSAGE - 92		
	BRAZILIAN KERATIN SMOOTHING - 70		

**Beauty**  
by the numbers

**16,034**

The average number of beauty services performed by SEI salon professionals each month in The Villages.

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\*These services are performed at only one SEI location.

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