

INFORMATION FOR EMERGING COMPANIES



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Tom Magliario of Tom Magliario's Hair Additions: Keeping on top of new techniques and technology.

# Keeping up appearances

Helping clients look their best has given Tom Magliario's Hair Additions a sound business model

BY JULIE RAMOS  
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Tom Magliario has been providing hair restoration services to Houston-area residents for more than 30 years, but his passion for his work is rooted in his own experience of losing his hair when he was 21.

"It really immobilized me," Magliario says. "It really changed my whole life to get my hair back. I know what that means."

The team at his salon, Tom Magliario's Hair Additions, provides nonsurgical hair restoration solutions ranging from laser therapy to personalized hairpieces and hair extensions.

Magliario says he's where he is now because, after trying some other fields, he fi-

nally found a craft he's passionate about.

His first career was as an elementary school teacher, something he did for four years before beginning to work toward a master's degree in the hopes it would bring advancement opportunities.

But when he realized that advancement would mean becoming an administrator and no longer working directly with children — his sole motivation for a teaching career — he decided to quit.

He then tried a career in real estate, working for four years in his native New Jersey selling properties in Florida and the Bahamas. He was even promoted to head of the Bahamas sales arm.

Although he was successful financially, he realized he had no passion for what he

was doing.

At that time, Magliario's uncle owned a salon in Florida that offered traditional hair restoration — essentially removable wigs and toupees held on by tape.

But when his uncle flew in two technicians from England who developed a more permanent technique involving the use of a medical polymer, Magliario was intrigued and flew to Florida to learn about the process.

That trip also exposed him to hair weaving — a solution for women with thinning hair.

The experience was pivotal for Magliario, and led to a decision to open a hair restora-

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tion salon along with his father-in-law.

With his father-in-law fronting most of the money, in 1971 Magliario moved his family halfway across the country to Dallas to begin the venture.

The salon was a quick success because, Magliario says, it offered the first permanent, nonsurgical hair replacement in Texas.

In 1972, Magliario and his father-in-law opened a second shop in Houston, now located at 6700 West Loop South.

In 1979 they sold the Dallas salon, a decision Magliario says was the best one he could have made, not only because the Houston store soon became more profitable but also because it allowed him to become more creative.

Magliario went on to buy his father-in-law's share of the business, assuming full ownership in 1985.

By that time the business had gained regular clients because, Magliario says, what was available wasn't "a one-shot deal." It was more like a hair makeover that required regular maintenance to maintain a fresh look and keep the natural hair growth in check.

In the mid-1980s, however, a downturn in Houston's economy left many of his clients unable to pay for their hair's upkeep. Magliario's solution was to introduce memberships, whereby clients paid for their hair restoration and maintenance services interest-free over a period of 12 months.

That made it easier for clients and

more predictable for the salon, Magliario says, and it has become the industry norm.

Around that same time, Tom Magliario's Hair Additions made a deliberate effort to go after the women's market, he says, adding that, in women, hair commonly begins to thin in their 40s and 50s.

Nowadays, hair-replacement technology is much more advanced.

Today, Magliario uses a product called Virtual Reality hair for men and Virtuesse Reality hair for women that allows technicians to make a personalized hair graft out of real human hair for people with premature hair loss.

"It's like a contact lens for your head," that's individually prescribed, Magliario says.

The hair is sewn into a porous membrane that attaches to the head with a medical polymer and is virtually undetectable.

The wearer can treat the hair as if it is his or her own, including shampooing, and the membrane is so thin that the scalp is washed as well. Monthly appointments at Magliario's studio keep the hair in good shape.

Karen Soremsen, who suffers from alopecia universalis, the most extreme form of alopecia in which all body hair is lost, has been a client of Magliario since 1998.

After deciding to give up on medication to treat her condition, Soremsen began to seek out hair alternatives while in high school, eventually settling on synthetic wigs.

"You get used to wearing a hair

piece," Soremsen says, "but you're always looking for something more comfortable."

At the suggestion of one of her mother's co-workers she went to see Tom Magliario where she first traded in her itchy, synthetic wig for a custom-made hairpiece made of real human hair, and later upgraded to the Virtuesse Reality.

"It feels like it's part of me," Soremsen says.

Magliario attributes much of the success of his salon to factors like having a good budget for research and development and keeping on top of new techniques and technology.

Six months ago, for example, the FDA approved a low-light laser therapy that studies showed could be effective in slowing hair loss and promote regrowth for certain candidates.

The same therapy has been in use at Magliario's salon for six years, he says, where it has been tested free of charge on consenting, regular clients in hopes of producing results for them.

But implementing new innovations isn't always without problems, Magliario has found.

When he decided six years ago to switch from traditional hairpieces like wigs and toupees to Virtual/Virtuesse Reality hair he almost lost many of his clients, he says, because the new technology meant asking clients to pay more than double what they had paid previously.

Believing the new product to be a significant improvement and because it looked much more natural, however, Magliario stuck with it. It was a choice

**TOM MAGLIARIO'S HAIR ADDITIONS**

BUSINESS: Nonsurgical hair restoration  
 FOUNDED: 1971  
 TOP EXECUTIVE: Tom Magliario, owner, founding partner.  
 EMPLOYEES: 12  
 REVENUE:  
 2006: \$1.3 million  
 2007: \$1.5 million  
 WEB SITE: www.tmhairadditions.com

to be competitive with quality instead of price, he says.

To win clients over, he introduced a program he called "love it or leave it," whereby he agreed to let his clients sample the new hair technology and, if they loved it, he would figure out a way for them to be able to afford it.

Fortunately, he says, "the product sells itself."

Dealing with clients on an individual, case-by-case basis also helped him persuade many of them to stick with him.

Business has continued to grow since then, along with his reputation. Magliario says the salon no longer advertises in the traditional sense of using television and newspaper ads.

Business comes from referrals generated by loyal clients and from wig stores and cosmetology students.

About 20 percent of the salon's business also comes from doctor referrals following chemotherapy treatment or other trauma experienced by their patients.

JULIE RAMOS is a Houston-based freelance writer.