

RANCHO SANTA FE REVIEW

December 24, 2009

Profile

Lynelle Lynch

Newly elected Girls Scouts board member and beauty schools' president approaches her work with view to 'making a difference'

By Arthur Lightbourn

RSF's Lynelle Lynch believes in enabling people.

In the past four years, since taking over the reins as president and co-owner of three San Diego beauty schools, she has graduated 10,700 students into the cosmetology world as hair stylists, estheticians, manicurists, makeup artists and massage therapists.

Her goal is not only to train her students to get their trade licenses, setting them on a path toward achieving their career and financial goals, but also to encourage them to reach out to clients who may be caught in abusive relationships.

Lynch's troika of beauty academies in Poway, National City and El Cajon were the first California institutions to participate in the national "Cut It Out" program that trains salon professionals how to recognize the warning signs of possible domestic abuse in their clients and refer them to resources for victim assistance.

"This [program] was formed in Alabama," Lynch said, "by some very brave women who realized that one out of three women is in an abusive situation which I find devastating....They basically

realized that somebody in an abusive situation would tell one of three people: their best friend, their sister or their service provider.

"And beauty and wellness professionals are service providers that have that relationship with clients where they do have some private discussions.

"Our program trains all our stylists...on what the warning signs are" so they can refer clients for assistance through the National Domestic Violence Abuse Hotline (1-800-799-7233).

She also offers free one-day "beauty camps" to area Girl Scouts.

"I thought what a wonderful thing it would be to bring young women when they are just starting to learn about hair and skin and taking care of themselves in for beauty camps," she said.

As a result, Lynch was recently elected to the Girl Scouts San Diego-Imperial Council's 29-member board of directors. The council is one of the largest in the U.S. providing training and activities for nearly 30,000 girls ages 5 to 17.

Lynch is a resident of Rancho Santa Fe.

We interviewed the 49-year-old former beauty queen and high-fashion retail execu-

utive in her Poway office situated in her flagship 20,000-sq. ft. Bellus Academy which is part of an elite group of selected Sassoon Academy member schools.

Not surprisingly, Lynch looks very much like a model: slender, blonde, with expressive green eyes and a confident stride; but talks like a business executive, which she is and has been throughout a three-decade business career that began in La Jolla at Saks Fifth Avenue when she was 20 and right out of college.

She was born Lynelle Lichtenheld in Copperous, Texas, a suburb of Fort Hood. Her father was serving in the Army at the time. "I was there for six months, but basically grew up in Colorado," she said.

In high school, she was a cheerleader and in 1978 won the Miss Colorado USA World title.

She studied fashion merchandising and chemistry at Colorado State, on an academic scholarship, but left before completing her degree.

"I got disenchanted with the fashion merchandising because they made me sew and I didn't think that's what I wanted," she said.

Arriving in California in 1981, she walked into Saks Fifth Avenue in La Jolla looking for work. "The only job they had open was as a telephone operator," she recalled. "I asked 'Do you promote from within? They said, 'Yes.' And I said, 'I'll take the job.'"

"Three days later, I was the assistant office manager. And three months later, I was the assistant general manager."

She went on to manage the then-Saks store in Mission Valley when she was 23 and at 26 became Saks' youngest general manager in charge of the Palm Springs store; and in 1995 she returned to San Diego to open the Saks Fifth Avenue store in Fashion Valley.

After 16 years with Saks, in 1997, she was recruited by the Greater San Diego Chamber of Commerce to serve as chief operating officer. As such, she directed the launching of



Lynelle Lynch
Photo/Jon Clark

an innovative benefit program for the Chamber's 3,000 members that gave them reduced prices on goods and services from various suppliers while providing royalties to the Chamber.

The business model for the profit-producing program was subsequently adopted by chambers throughout California and Arizona.

"How do we work together?"

"We don't," they replied. They required a minimum of five years' experience for anyone seeking a cosmetology job.

"And I said, 'How can we change the educational side so that you will hire our graduates right out of school?'"

"And literally, that's

'I've always loved a good competition or I've loved when someone said I can't do something.'

When she inherited the responsibility of running the three beauty schools owned by her entrepreneur husband, William Lynch, after the schools' former president passed away four years ago, she assembled an advisory board consisting of owners and directors of high-end salons and spas and asked,

what we've done."

She gave all three schools a facelift and beefed up the educational offerings to include advanced skills that would make graduates more employable in today's market.

She increased the Poway school's courses from three to 17, including advanced

training in make-up, massage and master esthetics, and expanded the square footage of the academy from 12,500 to 20,000 sq. ft., to accommodate up to 500 students.

She currently has 320 students enrolled at Bellus.

Her two other smaller beauty colleges, Je Boutique in El Cajon and Bay Vista in National City, offer programs of basic and some advanced courses.

She also introduced an external program in which students spend one day a week working in various top spas and salons throughout the county as an integral part of their training.

"I wanted to make a difference and I knew that I loved the fashion and beauty industries...and I saw what a shame it was that people were only getting enough education to get a license but not make money. And historically, I've always loved a good competition or I've loved when someone said I can't do something."

"And I just set out to surround myself with the experts in the industry to say, 'Why can't we revolutionize beauty education?'"

The revolution has become her passion.

"We want our students to live their dreams," she said, "and show them all of the icons within the industry so they see, yes, they can go on to be a trainer, a platform artist, own their own spa, own their own medical spa, be a manufacturer and develop their own product line, or work backstage [as makeup artists] in Hollywood."

"Once they meet some of the individuals who are owners of businesses, they realize that their dream [of becoming cosmetologists] taken to the next level, is achievable."

"We really believe that beauty is a very solid premier career."

Lynch serves on the boards of the California Association of Postsecondary Schools and the American Association of Cosmetology and various industry boards.

To keep in shape, she works out every morning in her home gym, does Pilates twice a week, and plays golf on Sunday mornings.

Quick Facts

Name: Lynelle Lynch

Distinction: Recently elected to the board of the Girls Scouts of the San Diego-Imperial Council. Lynelle Lynch is president and co-owner of a network of three cosmetology colleges in Poway, National City and El Cajon. She also serves on the board of the YWCA and various industry boards.

Resident of: Rancho Santa Fe

Born: Copperous Cove, Texas, (suburb of Fort Hood)

Education: Studied fashion merchandising and chemistry at Colorado State University.

Family: She and her husband, entrepreneur and long-time Ranch resident, William Lynch, have been married four years.

Interests: Volunteerism, golf, skiing, travel

Favorite Film: "Casablanca," classic 1942 film starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman

Reading: Avid reader of business books.

Philosophy: "Making a difference."