



STYLE SCHOOL

by Anne Fullem

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Launching a Career in the Beauty Industry

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With a unique curriculum, blending a progressive focus on business management with all the artistic tools an aspiring student needs, The Colorlab Academy of Hair in Bel Air prepares women for a successful future.
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No beauty school drop outs here. Harford County's only beauty school is leading the way in beauty education. The Colorlab Academy of Hair in Bel Air, has come a long way from it's humble beginnings, largely in part to the current Dean and owner, Clare Santiago. Her background was a perfect mix of business and beauty which prepared her for this leadership role. Clare and her husband, Raymond, own and operate Unique Auto Body in Fallston, and her mother, Hrisi Alevras, owns Color Lounge Salon in Hickory. Her formal education prepared her for a career in nursing, but her mother encouraged her to get her cosmetology license. "You just never know when it might come in handy," said her mother. Even though she had no plans to use it, Clare took her advice and received her license in 2000.

Her mother received her cosmetology license at the old International Beauty School, which some of you might remember, was perched atop the 7-11 on Route 1 for many years. The original school was founded in 1982, but in 2003 Clare's parents bought the academy at it's current location on Archer Street in downtown Bel Air, right behind it's original location. Her father added a second story, and the school continued to train local women, as well as provide a clinic for local patrons.

As it turns out, Clare's Mom was right. When the economy started to change, Clare made the decision to go to work with her Mom at the Color Lounge. It wasn't long before her parents asked her to take a look at the Beauty Academy and see what she could do to update their programs and improve their overall curriculum and practices.

Three years ago Clare decided to buy the academy from her parents, and threw herself into the challenge of updating the facility. Abscending with her best employee from Unique Auto Body, she brought in Barbara Buckley as her right-hand woman. The two started a complete overhaul on the school and launched a re-branding campaign. The first thing to change was the name. The ColorLab Beauty Academy was inspired by Clare's encouragement of her students to be *mad scientists with color*. "It's all about the color," said Clare. "We use only Wella, Nioxin and Sebastain products, and we encourage our students to be creative when using them", she concluded.

The rules were the next thing to change. Students used to come and go as they pleased, and as you might expect with a group of young girls, you never knew when drama would erupt. A half day orientation was developed by Clare

and her staff to explain what was expected of the students. Motivational speaking is part of the every day curriculum and focus is on the spirit of cooperation and mutual support. With staff always on hand and Clare's door always open, students maintain a real sense of camaraderie.

The school always taught the basics needed to earn a cosmetology license, but Clare expanded their curriculum to give her students the basics for a successful career, which includes financial responsibility and business skills. Booking clients, selling product, resume writing, working the front desk and controlling their income through repeat business and referrals, is covered in ColorLabs Nuts & Bolts program.

Finally, the clinic was overhauled to a full-service salon. Students had always "practiced" on the local population, but the experience had been lacking in many ways. Clare strove to make the experience feel more like a salon, to benefit both the students and their clientele. Senior students provide every service imaginable to local patrons who benefit from the great service at substantially discounted prices. Instructors work with students and clients every step of the way to guarantee the students success, and the clients satisfaction. When the students mentioned they needed more men to practice on, Clare declared every Wednesday "Free Men's Haircut Day". They have a promo/special for everyday of the week. You can find them online at our website or stop in to grab a calendar. "I wanted the experience to be as real for the students as possible... show them what it feels like to work in a busy salon, and then teach them how to thrive in that environment", said Clare

Not only is ColorLab Beauty Academy the only beauty school in Harford County, Clare has raised the level of education to one of the best

available anywhere. They have just been added as a Wella Signature School, there are only 29 others in the country. "Our goal is to prepare these girls to go anywhere in the field of beauty and succeed," said Clare.

So what does a ColorLab education entail? Every student is given a comprehensive beauty kit when they enroll, complete with their own practice head. The curriculum which is taught in theory, lecture and demonstration, comprises 1,500 hours of education. Students spend their first 240 hours in the classroom as Freshman. They study theory, practice on their model heads, and practice on each other. Topics include hairstyling, manicuring, permanent waving, hair relaxing, chemical pressing, coloring, draping, fingerwaving, waxing, soft curl permanents, facials, make-up artistry, hygiene, bacteriology, cells, sterilization, anatomy, and professional ethics, just to name a few.

The next 180 hours are spent on the salon floor. Shadowing the Seniors and working closely with staff, the Juniors learn more advanced skills while performing manicures, shampoos, eyebrow waxing and practicing the basics. Students take turns working the front desk and scheduling appointments. A small student to teacher ratio guarantees that students are getting the support they need to function in a real-world scenario, and ColorLab clients leave satisfied.

Seniors spend their remaining 1,080 hours working in the salon with their instructors, honing their newly learned skills on real clients. Guest speakers and field trips, like the one to the NY Hair Show, add excitement and inspiration to the lessons. Vidal Sassoon, M•A•C Make-up and other companies provide other outside-the-classroom learning experiences. Students aren't the only ones who benefit from this type of education. Instructors are constantly updating their knowledge and keeping abreast of current trends. Some of the staff will be traveling to California this February to take their training to become a Vidal Sassoon Academy, which is their next goal. "It would be a huge honor, and a real benefit for our instructors and students," said Barbara.

Some more trendy techniques taught at the ColorLab are chalking (think tie-dye color), ombre, feathers, fantasy extensions and color hair threads. "Braids are big too this year, they were all over the runway," said Clare. "We also teach our students how to work with ethnic hair, it's important for them to be able to perform any of these new techniques on any hair type," she concluded.



Barbara Buckley, Director of Support & Claire Santiago, Owner, Dean & CEO



Student, Kaven Jones, works on her practice head, applying color.



Every student receives a styling kit complete with their own heads



ColorLab Academy Staff and students take a moment to pose for the cameras

At each stage students are evaluated to make sure they are ready to proceed to the next level. The ultimate goal of their education is to pass the Maryland State Boards and receive their cosmetology license, so the first Tuesday of every month is State Board Day. At the real exam, the students are given a 100-question written test pertaining to theory, the remainder of the test is practical technique. The students must demonstrate their skills exactly as described by the board moderator. Practice days work just like the real thing. Students must show up on time, show their ID's and pass the test. By the time a Senior has graduated they have run through the practice drill twelve times. "Our graduate success rate is almost 100% on the first try. The girls are prepared, and it shows. We're proud of every one of them," said Clare.

When students graduate from the ColorLab Academy, they are ready to start their careers, or continue their education and specialize in a specific area. If they are planning to get a job in a salon, their instructors have prepared them to be discerning in their choice of potential employers. Is the salon clean, do they play the right music, is customer service an important part of the job? If not, than maybe it's not the right salon for them. Many students choose to go on and continue their education for a myriad of potential careers in the beauty industry. "We tell all of our students that a cosmetology license doesn't mean you'll be standing behind a chair. You can go on and work on movies, do make-up for movie stars, become a rep for a beauty based company and travel all over the world. The sky is the limit and your ColorLab education will open the door," stated Clare.

If you are interested in a career in beauty, you couldn't find a better foundation than the education offered at ColorLab Academy of Hair. New classes start every month, and with day and evening sessions, it can fit into anyone's schedule. The financial aid office works with prospective student and helps evaluate the options available to them. They explain the financial assistance options, help with grants and acquiring student loans.

If all you need is a little pampering, than you can't go wrong at the ColorLab Salon. The services are top-rate, but you can't beat the prices. How does \$35 sound for a haircut, blow-dry and make-up package? Manicures are \$8 and pedicures \$18. They use Wella color and color services start at \$40 for a retouch. For more information on the ColorLab Academy of Hair and a complete list of salon services and prices, log onto their website at www.colorlabacademy.com.