

Big Wig

Evelyn Valcourt has been helping women look and feel better about themselves for more than 28 years

By Aileen Goos Bérard – For the Free Press

There's a mirror at the front door of Evelyn Valcourt's home that says "You Look Fabulous!" It's a promise she makes to every woman who leaves her wig shop with a new look and renewed confidence.

For more than 28 years, Ms. Valcourt has been consulting women and helping them find alternatives for hair loss as a result of chemotherapy treatment, Alopecia Areata, Lupus, Trichotillomania or thinning hair.

In that time, she can't imagine how many women she's made look good and feel even better, simply with a new do.

"Women are something else when it comes to their hair. They could be here for 12 hours trying on wigs and still find something to say about their hair," says Ms. Valcourt, owner and manager of Evelyn's Wig Sales and Service.

"It's such an important part of their lives. Every day it's something or someone different."

Of all the clients who've sat in her swivel chair and tried on a

new hairpiece, a few stand out, like a three-year-old girl whose hair wouldn't grow. Her parents took the little girl to one of Evelyn's Wigs' public events at the CanadInns hoping they would find just the right look.

"She picked a blonde bob that I happened to have on for a really good deal. She just loved it. And then she wanted to try on more and more."

Customers could spend a day trying on all of Ms. Valcourt's fashionable finds. She says she has Manitoba's largest selection of European designer wigs and hairpieces made from human hair or synthetic materials that clients often tell her are better than their own hair.

It all started when Ms. Valcourt, who was dissatisfied toiling away in an office, took a job selling wigs and accessories at The Bay. Back then, she says with a giggle, she and her co-workers would sneak wigs to wear during their breaks.

But after years of establishing new locations and building up clients at the national retailer, she decided she knew enough to take a risk and strike out on her own.

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Wig purchases start with hour's consultation, end with a smile

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In the early days, the shop was six wigs in the corner of her kitchen. It has since grown to fill an entire front room lined with shelves adorned with mannequins modeling a wide range of cuts and colours, drawers full of hair accessories, and special lights that show the highlights in her selection of wigs. Even her license plate reads Big Wig.

As tempting as it would be to take advantage of what she has in stock and play with a new look every day, she's narrowed down her personal wig collection to just two.

Ms. Valcourt is the first to admit that it's been a challenge being a woman business owner operating in rural Manitoba. Her shop is in Lorette, about 15 minutes east of the Royal Canadian Mint, and she's spent a small fortune on advertising to grow the business into what it is today.

But there have been some high points, too. She won a hard-fought battle with the government

that lasted nearly five years and convinced former finance minister Eric Stefanson to eliminate the provincial sales tax on wigs purchased for medical conditions or treatments causing hair loss.

Clients from all over Manitoba and parts of Ontario come to her shop for a visit that, she says, starts with a one-hour consultation and ends with a smile.

The honorary member of the Manitoba Hairstyling Association helps women find an item that looks best on them and then counsels them on proper maintenance.

For example, synthetic wigs don't hold up in some conditions, especially heat and steam.

Watching her fluff curls, fix stray bangs on bobs or tying braided knots in headbands, it's clear she loves her job.

"I'm really convinced that this is my calling," she says. "It's what I'm meant to do."

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