

## Olmsted Falls salon helps cancer patients

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By Joseph Clark, Sun News



When customers walk into Smart Cutz, the Cook Road hair salon near the Olmsted Falls/Olmsted Township border owned by Laura Smart, they see the store logo with a pink ribbon threaded around the 'C' in Cutz, on the right wall.

At the counter, there is a display of pink and scarlet watches. Sales benefit cancer research. In the last eight years, Smart donated hundreds of dollars to Relay for Life and the Dora Hosta Run. But Smart offers still more to her clients with cancer.

Off the main floor of her salon, in a modest chamber with a locking door, is Smart's "Survivor Room." Adorned with a cabinet of pink-ribboned toys and ornaments given by clients, Smart built the room to offer chemotherapy patients a space to have their heads shaven in an atmosphere of privacy and support.

"They can have privacy if they need it, or if they need to cry," Smart said. "It's just a room where you don't have to have humiliation. They bring in wigs, and I cut them, and hopefully they come back when they have hair."

Smart said about 15 women have used the room since she opened Smart Cutz last July. She conceived the idea for the room after her own embarrassment when she had her head shaved in an open salon during her ordeal with cancer.

In 2004, while working as a hairdresser by renting chairs in a number of local salons, Smart received her own diagnosis of breast cancer during a mammogram. She said it came as a surprise, as she had no family history with the disease.

“I didn’t think about it then, just like I don’t think about it now, to be honest,” Smart said.

Initial hopes that the cancer could be cured with a lumpectomy were short-lived. She had to take more than four months off work for treatment. The choice was difficult, as it altered the relationship she had spent years building with patrons.

“It was hard having to switch clients around, figuring out what to do with them,” Smart said.

She underwent a mastectomy, followed by months of chemotherapy, during which she returned to work. When she was in her 20s, Smart owned her own salon. In 2011, she was able to open Smart Cutz, hired seven people and took out a long-term lease. She knew from the beginning she would want to make cancer advocacy — including the Survivor Room — part of the business.

“I think women like to hear my story. I think it’s a comfort, especially when they see my hair, because I tell them I was bald for a year. I’m trying to encourage survivorship,” Smart said.

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