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*Quality*  
**Gorge Academy  
of Cosmetology**

**Professional  
training for the  
beauty industry**  
opens doors of opportunity

JIM DRAKE  
For The Dalles Chronicle

With hard work and enthusiasm, Gorge Academy of Cosmetology owner Kerri Weed is going three years strong on providing opportunities for students interested in learning about careers in beauty.

“We are here to increase the professionalism in the beauty industry. Hairdressers, nail technicians and estheticians are all listed in the top 20 best careers to have without a college degree,” Weed said.

The academy provides professional instruction and a real-life teaching salon environment for hair design, esthetics, nail technology and barbering in downtown The Dalles. With more than 20 students currently enrolled, completion of a particular program can give students the state-required hours of work and training needed for taking state licensing exams.

“There’s so much freedom and flexibility and reward in this industry. You can go anywhere in the world with a license in your pocket. You can open your own business, you can travel, you can even work on the Hollywood runways. The sky’s the limit,” Weed said.

Now, after three years, Weed says the academy is expanding into massage therapy training.

Since opening, Weed said she constantly received calls from people seeking out massage therapy training opportunities. In 2019 Weed wrote up a curriculum and applied to the Oregon Board of Massage Therapy.

“We got approved and we have been developing a program; it’s really exciting,” Weed said.

The first enrollment opportunity started in February of this year.

With family roots in The Dalles, Weed’s 16 years of experience working for the Paul Mitchell Systems hair care company as a marketing specialist put her in direct contact with salons and schools throughout the country. Now, she has brought her expertise to help students experience the education and training that is needed to be successful in the beauty field.

“This is where my passion is; I love this industry,” Weed said.

Besides being involved in developing all the programs at the academy, Weed said that she was hands-on with some of the construction that went into renovating the historic downtown building.

“The building is on the historic registry. When we bought it we needed 100 percent new electrical, plumbing, and then we realized the downstairs space wasn’t up to code. I worked with Adams Construction

and brainstormed how to make the downstairs space usable,” Weed said.

Now, the academy’s esthetics room is downstairs, along with individual booths for the massage therapy program. Repurposed handrails lead the way to a student lounge, a conference room and storage lockers.

“We took the old electrical conduit out and I cleaned it up and rehabbed it,” Weed said.

Even some of the old tongue and groove wood used for trim and shelving upstairs came from the family farm; an example of Weed’s commitment to reusing and recycling as much as possible.

Weed said it took many long hours to write the business plan and a lot of persistence to get bank funding to start the academy.

“Bankers asked me why I wanted to start a beauty school in a rural area. It didn’t come to fruition until a local banker actually went home and talked to his wife, and he learned about how important the connection was that people develop with their hairdresser, and the impact on the economy it had,” Weed said.

The academy now provides jobs for seven instructors, and frequently brings in guest artists to teach more specialized topics.



Students work with instructors on providing salon services to customers at Gorge Academy of Cosmetology  
Jim Drake photo

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