

Steam pours from the gleaming steel nozzle nearby. The figure in the lab coat brings the glowing, pulsing device closer and closer to the face of the woman lying on the table. Her hands and feet have been put into electric receptacles — and they're getting hot.

Purple light shooting through its stem, the device comes nearer and nearer to her gauze-shrouded face. Finally, as it touches, the woman opens her mouth and lets out a — sigh.

The device isn't an instrument of torture but an implement of beauty: the steam doesn't scald, it relaxes pores. And the figure in the smock isn't a mad scientist; she's Lucienne Gilson, trained in her native Belgium to care for what most people neglect: their faces.

The name of the operation is Lucienne European Facial and Body Salon; mostly, they steam-clean faces. With lotions, herbal packs and a battery of buzzing electrical gadgets, Lucienne and staff stroke, squeeze and steam neglected American mugs into pink and healthy kissers.

When manager and owner Jane Harberts opened Lucienne (formerly Embryo Skin Care Center) in the Oakway Mall in Eugene last year, she confesses having at least one selfish motive: a never-ending supply of facials. She'd had one at Gilson's home after coming to Oregon from Minnesota, and decided to open a salon where she (and everyone else) could enjoy such an "an exquisite treat."

"I've always been interested in medicine and healing," says Harberts, "and the salon keeps me into that field. And it's such a pleasureable business."

The salon boasts a steadily increasing clientele, despite a shortage of qualified help. Harberts says she's looking hard, but qualified applicants are hard to find; in other beauty businesses a cosmetologist with a

license would top the field, but at Lucienne that license is only an admission requirement.

Lucienne Gilson is an aesthetician — a paramedical specialist trained in all phases of skin care. Trying to find someone else as qualified can be trying; the only training center for aestheticians in this country is in Dallas. So for the nonce, Harberts will be promoting from the ranks.

Kathy Bomareto, currently a "facialist" at Lucienne, is in such training now. She handles many of the special services offered at Lucienne, including manicures, pedicures and the "Body Whip" treatment. Though not sado-masochistic, the treatment is quite pleasurable.

The Whip, a special lotion, is massaged into the hands and feet; then special electric "mittens" are put on to deep-heat the moisturizer into the skin. This and other sensual delights take only a little getting used to, says Gilson.

"We're so new we frighten people," she says. "In Europe it's not unusual to have your face deep-cleaned and toned regularly. In America, though, people still try to achieve beauty by buying new clothes or shoes or lots of make up — working from the outside in. Here it's different, and sometimes people are a bit nervous about having their faces scrutinized."

Men are particularly slow to bring their faces in for a checkup, Lucienne says, and it's too bad for them.

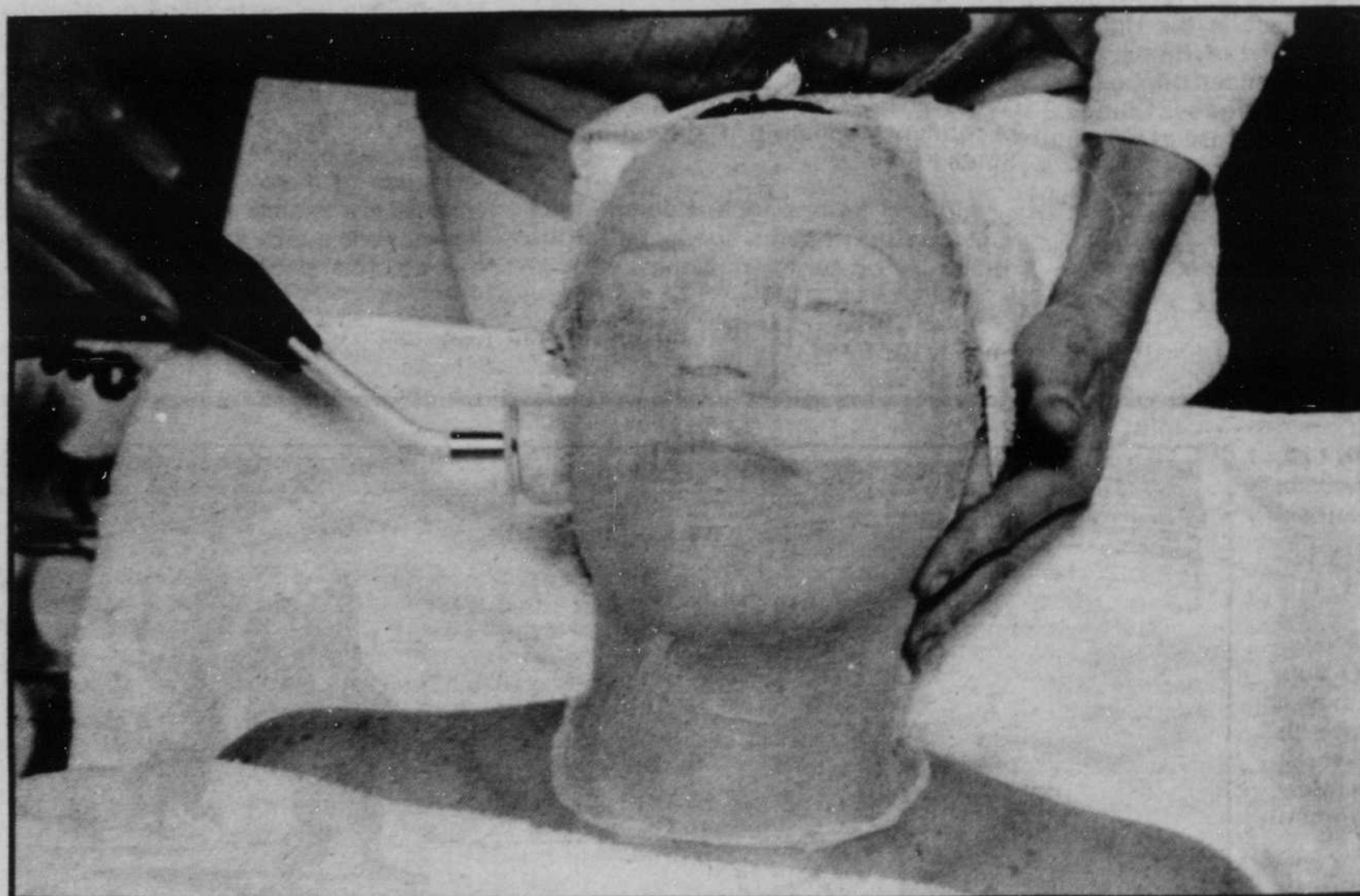
"It's a youthful job market. Why shouldn't a man take advantage of everything that can make him more attractive?" Firefighters, construction workers and other men whose faces take a beating need regular deep-cleaning too, she says.

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Marti Chaney's not being mummified — she's getting the "ultraviolet roller" treatment.

Sending your face to the cleaners



Lucienne Gilson combines modern electronics with the personal touch to clean up American faces.

Story by John Crowley

Photos by Erich Boekelheide

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