

## the entrepreneurs

# Small is big at this business

**ONE-ON-ONE ATTENTION** is Lorie Docker's focus at Medispa, an intimate service in an industry of monster-size spas

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In the spa industry, the rule of thumb is usually the bigger the better. The norm is typically a large space equipped with several estheticians who offer a multitude of services to a huge number of clients. Makes sense, right?

Wrong, says Lorie Docker, owner of **Medispa Jouvence** in Westmount.

"We're a modern business with an old-fashioned approach, so we wanted our spa to be small and intimate," Docker said. "From the beginning, we wanted it to be focused

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RADIO PERSONALITY SUZANNE DESAUTELS

on the services and one-on-one time with the clients while respecting their desire for privacy."

The highly specialized skin centre opened nine years ago in the Westmount Medical Building on Sherbrooke St.

It's a medical spa, meaning that it doesn't offer the conventional services like pedicures and massages, but rather several skin treatments and laser hair removal. The spa also sells Docker's own line of specialized skin care products.

"When I was studying to be an esthetician, I realized right away that I was very interested in the science of skin and the chemistry of the products available," Docker said. "That's why our spa focuses on the skin, and treatments such as peels and anti-aging."

Docker has taken a different approach to the science of beauty. "I can't imagine anyone else touching my skin, Lorie is so good at what



Medispa Jouvence owner Lorie Docker (left) speaks with client Suzanne Desautels at the small spa in Westmount. The medical spa focuses on skin treatments and laser hair removal rather than conventional services.

she does," said longtime Medispa client Suzanne Desautels, a local radio and TV personality. "You feel so special there, you're treated so differently than at a big spa, it's so personal."

Docker aims to educate clients about how to properly care for their skin, and customizes all treatments to each individual client. Which is no small feat considering the spa has roughly 2,000 clients.

"There is so much information

out there and it can be very confusing and misleading for people interested in treatments," she said. "And unfortunately, honesty is not always common in esthetics, companies promise results and use treatments on people who aren't necessarily good candidates; we see this a lot in laser hair removal."

Medispa has five specially trained estheticians and a plastic surgeon who comes in on a consultation basis.

While she trained for three years with two plastic surgeons in Manhattan and Ottawa, Docker said surgery is not their focus.

"We specialize in a non-surgical approach," Docker said. "There are so many amazing products available, people shouldn't jump to surgery, and it's our job to guide them and decide what's best for each client."

While the majority of its clients are women, as with most spas, Medi-

spa boasts a large male clientele.

"About 40 per cent are men," Docker said. "Men are very different than woman, they value their privacy so much with regards to any treatment so our private set-up is ideal for them as we always accommodate their needs in terms of scheduling."

Docker's emphasis on personal, customized service has been very successful. In their first three years of business they grew at a rate of 30 per cent each year.

"In that third year we decided we had to be careful because we didn't want to be overstocked with clients as our retention rate is up around 75

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MEDISPA JOUVENCE OWNER LORIE DOCKER

per cent; so we started advertising less," she said.

That said, the spa has still grown 10 to 15 per cent annually since then.

Because they're so small, Medispa can provide many unique perks. For instance, having the same esthetician for treatments on different dates.

"It's impossible to measure progress when you weren't there at the beginning, so while most spas use all of their estheticians for all of their clients, we make sure that the person who starts your treatment is the person who finishes it," Docker said.

Docker swears by her "small is big" business model and in an industry ripe with monster-sized spas, she's quite content to go a different way. "I've always felt that if I was going to be in business long term, I have to treat the client like I would want to be treated, that's been our approach from the start," Docker said.