



By Julie Auton

## THE *Faces* BEHIND ABOUT FACE SKIN CARE

Chrissy Thomas never envisioned a career as an entrepreneur. She didn't start off with a business plan, much less a business card. But by taking advantage of an opportunity that came her way and exploring a world she found intriguing, she has ended up with a thriving skin care practice and a dedicated – and growing – clientele.

The Snellville native and owner of About Face Skin Care, Thomas employs a team of skin care specialists, offers a range of services utilizing the best advanced technologies, and sells high quality products to targeted clientele of men and women who are midlife and older.

What sets her business apart is her background as a registered nurse. This enables Thomas to tap into medical technologies and products that are off-limit to spas. About Face also has a medical director, Meera Garcia, MD, who oversees the practice, and another RN was recently added to the team. Their medical expertise gives them the ability to factor each client's particular health history and health issues when deciding upon a skincare plan.

"This allows us to provide the best treatment plan," she says.

But there's another reason for Thomas' success: her friendly and easygoing personality is reflected in every aspect of her business. Visitors enter a calm, turquoise interior (her favorite color) with decidedly classy yet comfortable touches that exude the relaxing environment of a spa and the warmth of a home. Her office has become a gathering place, where clients feel comfortable visiting with each other in the waiting area, and checking out new products with the staff. Frequently, Thomas' two children, Ella (9) and Dawson (10) drop by after school, adding to the liveliness.

The team embraces Thomas' values and work ethic, offering exceptional personal attention and customer service.

"We focus on a client's true skin care needs based on their financial ability, rather than selling unnecessary products and services," she says. "My reputation is important, and every work related decision I make impacts my reputation and my business. It's not about making money, but maintaining professionalism and being a respected part of this community that matters most."

This philosophy has garnered a strong and loyal following.

A graduate of the Georgia Baptist College of Nursing (now Mercer), Thomas started her career working in the OR at Egleston Children's Hospital (now Children's Healthcare of Atlanta) and carried on the duties of Charge Nurse of Plastic Surgery. She then moved to an adult based plastic surgery practice. During her time there, Thomas witnessed first-hand the positive aspects of women having a facelift or other facial surgery.

"I noticed an overall change in patients after surgery," she says. "When a woman looked better, she felt bet-

ter and seemed happier. Often, it would motivate a woman to make healthier lifestyle choices, such as begin an exercise program, or quit smoking, or eat more nutritiously."

Although Thomas primarily assisted in surgery, she gradually took over the practice's skin care service, and became fascinated the more she researched the products and technologies available. She also got an earful from these mostly 40- to 80-year-old women about their frustrations over their aging skin.

"I consistently heard the same complaints: larger pores, drooping skin, and creases around their eyes and mouth," she recalls. "Everyone had these problems, and although they could have a facelift, it didn't cure their real issues."

When the plastic surgeons retired, Thomas figured she would work part-time at another private practice. But her current clients and her husband, Sam, had other ideas.

"I never thought about running my own business. I'm the first person in my family to be an entrepreneur, so it's uncharted waters for me," she says. "However, Sam has had his own business, and his parents ran their own company, so he encouraged me to go out on my own and taught me what to do. He's been my backbone."

In 2002, three weeks after the birth of their daughter, Ella, Thomas launched About Face and her customers from the dissolved plastic surgery practice followed. One client offered Thomas office space intown for her treatments, while other customers made suggestions on how to grow the business. Bit by bit, word spread as happy customers referred friends, and continued to provide advice and ideas, and Thomas' practice took off.

Now that she was unaffiliated with a surgical team, Thomas increasingly educated herself on how to make women look younger without surgery--such as skin exfoliation, color correction, muscle lifting, skin tightening, Botox and Juvederm.

"I went to every medical conference on skin care I could find and interviewed my peers across the country, tapping them for information about what worked and what didn't," she says. "My research revealed there were four areas of problems with facial skin: uneven texture, color variation, sagging skin, and 'jowly' appearance around the middle of the face. I realized that if I could fix these issues, then I could make

people feel better about themselves."

Thomas eventually moved her office close to home in Snellville as family demands increased with two growing children. Both Thomas and Sam grew up here and were high school friends at Brookwood. They married after college, and eventually renovated Sam's childhood home, where they currently live.

Today, About Face services men and women throughout the metro Atlanta area, including Roswell and Peachtree

City. Interestingly, her male customer base has grown over 100% this past year, which she attributes to the critical importance of appearance in today's job market. And her business keeps growing.

Nine years after first she opened her doors, Thomas is still surprised at her success. "I went into this thinking it would be temporary...that eventually, I'd have to get a 'real job'," she says. "Instead, it's turned into a career."

In fact, About Face has grown so significantly that Thomas and her husband took the ultimate leap of faith this year by Sam quitting his corporate job to help run the business.

"I needed a business manager to run the day-to-day operations and marketing," she says. "Sam had always been on periphery, but now he's fully entrenched so he can take the business to the next level." It also allows Thomas and Sam to participate more fully in their children's lives.

"Working in close proximity to our kids' school and having on-the-job flexibility helps us put family first—which is our priority," says Thomas. "Sam often picks them up after school now that he's no longer commuting to a corporate job downtown, and the kids love that special time with him."

Thomas and her husband also can more easily juggle their busy work schedules to attend Ella and Dawson's myriad school events and favorite pastimes, including (but not limited to) baseball, swim team, piano and dance. The Thomases laugh, "These two are another full time job! But we wouldn't miss this for the world."

Summers beckon the family to their backyard pool, where swimming, cookouts and entertaining take place all season long. The Thomases are thankful to be in a community where their kids can grow up with the same memories of family, friends and great schools that they shared. Because of their deep roots in the area, grandparents and great grandparents live within a quick drive, giving Thomas' children opportunities for spend-the-nights, birthday celebrations and simply hanging out.

But next to her love of family comes her business. Her ultimate goal is to be the skincare service leader in her field, which she plans to achieve by continually immersing herself in medical journals, listening to her peers and customers, and introducing treatments that have been thoroughly tested in the market. In the meantime, Thomas says her life is full with family, home, business and clients, many of whom have become close friends.

"I love this business because you see people's lives change," she says. "And, I've benefited as well. All these older women have shared their stories and advice, and have taught me life lessons. It's been a gift to receive their insights, and I've planned my life accordingly." About Face Skin Care is located at 1561 Janmar Road, A in Snellville. For more information, call 770-935-FACE, info@aboutfaceskin.com or www.aboutfaceskin.com.

