

NORTH SUBURBAN PROFILE

She's got style, helps you find yours

By STEPHANIE FOSNIGHT
Contributor

Find Fashion Happiness seems an apt name for Suzanne Newman's image consultant business.

Her clients say changing their wardrobes—and changing their styles—has actually changed their lives.

"Going in the closet used to be a defeating activity. I'd say 'I don't like anything and nothing looks good on me,'" said Winnetka resident Carol Fessler, who's been using Newman's consulting services for a year.

"Now I say, 'That looks great!' It's a self-affirming activity."

In fact, Fessler said she and her daughter both lost weight after working with Newman to find flattering makeup, hair and clothing styles that best reflect their personalities. Now that they know how good they can look, they're more motivated to take care of them-

selves.

"We feel better in the clothing we're wearing," Fessler said. "I think there's something (harmful) about going into that closet every single day when you feel terrible and fat and ugly."

Newman has become a household name among many north suburban women who refer Find Fashion Happiness to their friends, neighbors and even husbands. Newman started her business three years ago after a divorce and has been astonished by the way other women have banded together to keep her coffers overflowing with clients.

"I just can't believe how it keeps on going," said Newman, a Deerfield resident who describes her business as more than a makeover service.

"It isn't about making somebody look pretty for one day," said Newman, who has a background in the

makeup and clothing industry. "It's helping them learn to make good choices so they feel good about themselves all of the time."

The problem with shows like *What Not to Wear*, Newman said, is the way the stylists rip on their clients for a laugh.

"I really hate that cruelty," she said. "This is more like what to wear. A lot of women, particularly if they've gained weight, have such a problem with their self esteem and often are wearing clothes that are too big or don't fit them well."

Newman's compassion and empathetic heart is what really draws her clients, Fessler said.

"I used to say that getting between a girl and her hair is the most dangerous place in the world, but here is someone getting between a girl, her wardrobe and her makeup," she said. "She goes into that place with a

very loving, gentle and sensitive attitude."

Overcoming difficulties

Newman overcame a difficult childhood with an abusive mother and left home at age 15 to live with an older brother. Although she almost dropped out of high school, a teacher intervened and secured early college admission for her.

She later worked as an account representative for Liz Claiborne before beginning a career as a freelance makeup artist. And she was constantly helping her friends choose makeup, hairstyles and clothing perfect for their shape and size.

"I think, given all the ugly things I experienced as a child, I always wanted to pretty things up and make people feel good," Newman said.

In 1991 Newman's daughter was born and she began a life as a stay-at-home

mom, but in 2004 experienced a shattering divorce and all of the life transition that comes with it.

"She did what she now helps others do," said Evanston resident Nina Kavin, her client and friend. "She made herself over."

It's about glow

Kavin discovered Find Fashion Happiness after commenting on a friend's glow at a party this spring.

"A bunch of us 40-something women were there, in the stage of life where our kids are at school and we have just a bit of time to take a breath and take stock of our jeans- and T-shirt selves," she said. "My friend told me her secret: She'd heard about Newman, set up the appointment and her new look was the result."

Soon Kavin and her other friends were all clients, too.

See **STYLE**, page A4

STYLE

Continued from page A3

What she really appreciates, Gavin said, is that Newman is down-to-earth and understands how people really live.

"She's as happy recommending a dress she saw at Old Navy as she is suggesting one from Nordstrom's," Gavin said. "She teaches you makeup tips. She may tell you that your underwear just doesn't fit. If you want, she'll take you shopping."

And, Gavin said, sometimes Newman will just sit on the bed and laugh, or lend a shoulder to cry on.

"When she leaves you feel lighter, more organized, energized and excited," she said.

Transitions

Newman's specialty, she said, is helping those enduring transitions, whether it be a mom faced with an empty nest, a teenager starting off to college, a man who wants a crisp look for business functions, or a child with image problems who needs a pick-me-up.

Now that Mary Beth Schaye's daughters are in school, she's begun to take stock of her own wardrobe and has found too many jeans and long-sleeved T-



Image consultant Suzanne Newman of Deerfield, right, discusses the pros and cons of a skirt with client Mary Beth Schaye in her Evanston home. Clara Schaye, a budding fashionista, looks on. — Buzz Orr/Staff Photographer

shirts. When a neighbor suggested she call Newman, who charges \$50 per hour for her services, Schaye was all for it, especially that she now has more time to devote to her business.

"I thought maybe my wardrobe needed to grow up a bit," said the Evanston resident.

One sunny afternoon found Newman and Schaye deep in the bowels of the master bedroom closet while 11-year-old Clara Schaye watched. Newman had already helped Schaye define the look she wanted

to achieve: Cool, feminine, a bit artsy and edgy but still pulled together.

The keep, alter, and give away piles on the bed grew higher and higher as Newman delved into the closet pulling out one item after another. Schaye tried on a pair of gray trousers that were slightly baggy about the hips and turned expectantly to Newman.

"They're not fabulous," Newman said diplomatically, eyeing Schaye with a practiced gaze. "They're a bit too big."

Next came a pair of den-

im capris with elaborate loops and pockets. Schaye told her consultant that she wears them often in the fall, paired with her favorite chunky sweaters.

"Those fit well and the length is good," Newman said. "But I would prefer to find something with a little cleaner look."

Exhausted wardrobe

Next came the skirts and tops. When Newman goes through a client's wardrobe, she asks if they'd like her to be gentle, honest or brutally honest. Schaye has told her to go for brutally honest and, so far, it's not too bad.

"Suzanne keeps using the word 'tired' to describe my wardrobe. Exhausted is what it is," Schaye said.

As they worked, the women kept a list of what Schaye needed to buy to fill out her closet and Newman gave suggestions tailored to Schaye's slender frame and height. She recommended Schaye wear shorter skirts but pair them with boots and black tights, instead of the black leggings popular among teens.

"Just about anybody can pull off tights," Newman said.

Fessler called Newman when her three children were suddenly at college and she realized her

wardrobe hadn't really changed since the kids were little.

"It was getting frumpier and frumpier," she said. "It was time to get out of survival mode and put some joy back into dressing and grooming."

Although Fessler is still a conservative dresser, Newman helped her discover colors, dresses and skirts that work well for her, like Fessler's favorite floaty, black-and-white polka dot skirt. She suggested a different hairstyle, so Fessler grew out the "shorter than football helmet" look and now maintains a shoulder-length style.

With Newman's assistance, Fessler ditched her tiny earrings and started buying dangly ones to complement her new look, which she calls joyful.

The biggest testament to Newman's skill, however, comes from the comments Fessler gets from others.

"People think I'm at least 10 or 15 years younger than I am," Fessler said.

And that's just what Newman likes to hear.

"I'm here to empower them," she said. Just as she did for herself.

Find Fashion Happiness;
(847) 721-0607; suz1960@sbc-global.net.