

BUSINESS

Leave Your Stress at the Door

BY *Laura Jean Whitcomb*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Paul Howe*



Peter Tremblay greets a guest at the door. “You’re here for a chocolate scrub?” he confirms. He provides spa shoes — plastic slip-ons designed for wet or dry conditions — and escorts the client to a relaxation area where a robe (just the right size) and tea await. There’s time to change, place your clothes in a locker and relax to soothing piano music before Jill Tremblay, a licensed massage therapist, knocks on the door.

Enter The Garden Spa in New London, and you’ll quickly become a regular visitor. How can you not when the owners, Peter and Jill, are extremely nice, and the services — from massage to body treatments to pedicures — are simply luxurious?



Hot lava stones are incorporated into a traditional Swedish massage to relax tired, sore muscles.

A lifelong dream

The Tremblays moved back to the Kearsarge area after almost a lifetime of Florida residency, and opened the spa in July 2003. Peter, born in Newport, was working for a CPA firm and Jill was the billing manager of a home health agency. “We celebrated an anniversary in Florida by going to a spa,” says Peter. “We were stressed out with our jobs and it had an amazing effect on both of us.” It became a lifelong dream to open a spa.

When they saw the 29 Little Sunapee Road location with all its wood and charm, Peter and Jill knew that the former fabric store would be a great location for The Garden Spa (www.gardenspanh.com). It took four months to transform the store’s open space on the first floor into a welcoming entryway, a waiting area, a lounge and a series of treatment rooms — a hand and foot

treatment room (for one or two), a main treatment room (for singles or couples) and a second massage room. They left the upstairs open — with the exception of a second lounge and additional treatment room — and the large space is often used for parties of six to eight people. “We’ve had bridal showers or birthday parties in this room,” says Peter. “Everyone can hang out between treatments, relax and have a good time.”

The spa opened its doors with a few basic services — Swedish massage and a few body treatments — but has grown over the past four years to include facials and pedicures. Peter and Jill, the only two staff members in the beginning, now head up a team of four massage therapists and two aestheticians. “We’re still growing, but we want to make sure we are doing it the best way,” says Peter.

The Tremblays also want to main-



The Garden Spa owners, Peter and Jill Tremblay

tain a certain ambiance; for example, instead of a pedicure throne, Peter and Jill use a chair with a bowl. “We have the high tech stuff we need, but we want to keep a certain ambiance. We don’t want to make it look like a medical facility,” explains Peter. “Treatment is important, but other factors play a role. Using the bowl is a different feel than sitting up in a chair.”

Preventative health care

A chocolate candle fills the room with its scent. For the first hour of the chocolate scrub, the client is massaged with a chocolate exfoliant, removing dead skin and improving circulation. Feet, legs, arms, hands, shoulders and back; first front, then back. Warm, wet cloths remove most of the gritty exfoliant, then it’s off to the shower for a complete rinse. A massage with chocolate butter cream lotion follows, and Jill pays special attention to knots in the neck and shoulders (where most folks carry their tension) and releases tightness in the legs.

STATS & FACTS

- More than 100 million Americans suffer from lower back pain, and nearly \$25 billion a year is spent in search of relief. A study showed that massage therapy produced better results and reduced the need for painkillers by 36 percent when compared to other therapies. (*Annals of Internal Medicine*)
- An estimated 20 million Americans suffer from depression. A review of more than a dozen massage studies concluded that massage therapy helps relieve depression and anxiety by lowering the stress hormone cortisol. (*University of Miami School of Medicine*)
- Preliminary research shows that hypertensive patients who received three 10-minute back massages a week had a reduction in blood pressure. (*Biological Research for Nursing*)
- Researchers at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center asked patients to report the severity of their symptoms before and after receiving massage therapy. Cancer patients reported reduced levels of anxiety, pain, fatigue, depression and nausea — even up to two days later. (*Journal of Pain & Symptom Management*)

“So many people think of massage as a luxury item, not a necessity,” says Jill. “Who isn’t stressed? Who doesn’t have something that hurts? If for one hour they can forget about whatever it is, then we’ve done our job.” She laughs and says, “Snoring is the best compliment a massage therapist can get.”

Brenda Velte received a gift certificate to The Garden Spa from her husband for Christmas. “I was a little nervous about going, and I kept putting it off,” says Velte, a Newport resident.

Now she’s a regular, visiting the spa every two or three weeks if she can. “I love it. It is very hard for me to relax — I’m always stressed — but Jill is an excellent therapist. The minute you walk in the front door you can feel it. You take a deep breath and start to relax.”

Tina Davis, a seventh grade teacher at Kearsarge Middle School, feels the same way. “I was apprehensive my first visit; I wasn’t sure what to expect,” the Springfield resident says. “But it was so

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wonderful and professionally done. People really need to try The Garden Spa. They'll get hooked like I am." Her favorite treatment is the "Head, Neck and Shoulder," Swedish massage techniques which help relieve some tension after a day hunched over the computer.

"Jill is my savior," says Penny Murano, North Sutton resident and owner of Abercrombie & Bridge in New London. "I bought the store last year, still had a business in Connecticut, and ran back and forth between the two. I literally could not move my neck. I've been to massage therapists all over the world, and Jill is the best massage therapist I've ever been to. She's kept my back in the best shape it has been in for years."


Spas are not only for the idle rich; a visit can be good preventative medicine for anyone who needs it (see sidebar on page 69). Many Garden Spa clients are "working class people. They are the folks that need it," says Jill. This makes Saturday the busiest day at the spa. But Peter and Jill will schedule evening appointments upon request, and plan to add a few nights with extended hours during the spa's Tuesday through Saturday week.

"I plan mine for the end of the day, so I can come straight home. After a massage, I'm like jelly," says Velte, who by day is a homemaker companion for the elderly. "It's a great, great experience. It just makes you feel fantastic."

"I don't need to ask how it was," says Peter. "I can see it in their body and their face." 

Laura Jean Whitcomb, editor of Kearsarge Magazine, thoroughly enjoyed the research for this article.

Paul Howe has been photographing professionally since 1980. He worked as a ski photographer for Waterville Valley from 1981 to 1986. From 1987 to 2005 he worked part time for the Argus-Champion. Howe's images have been published in many magazines and he also photographs weddings and takes portraits. Howe has his own Web site at www.paulhowephoto.com



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