



CATHY CHENEY THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

# A healing haven for stressful times

BY GAIL DANA

Special to The Business Journal

**A**t Aequis An Inclusive Retreat, the staff moderate their voices, walk softly and gently touch flesh. This group of women meaning business know what women want.

Exactly the same treatment men take for granted.

Geishas to the ladies (and okay, some men, too), the staff of nine welcome tired businesspersons to their Pearl District getaway. Then they serve them wine, tea or mineral water while massaging their feet with warmed oils. They take their clients by the hand to a back room where the client privately disrobes, lies prone beneath a heated blanket and is soon rubbed down with hot salts, kneaded with scented oils, heated in a steam tent and massaged head to toe into oblivion. It's not over.

Must it ever be?

Eyes wired tightly into their sockets via overcaffeination are touched softly, then capped with tea-soaked pads. Foreheads blasted by tension get the fingertip treatment. Calm hands smooth out puckered mouths. Even hands-become-workaholic-

claws are de-tensed: oiled, rubbed joint to joint and fitted into hot mitts.

In the dark ages of 2000 such treatments might have been a holiday treat for a woman. In enlightened 2002 they're a membership deal: A superior alternative to calling her best

friend (now overworked as well) when overwrought.

The woman behind the concept is Megan Klein. Once a pre-med student at the University of California, San Francisco, Klein developed an interest in alternative skin care when she received first and second degree burns while mountain climbing. The UCSF clinic used aloe to treat her face. Then they recommended she buy a product called CamoCare Sun Therapy.

"My face improved drastically" Klein said. At the same time, her career interest drastically shifted to alternative skin care treatments.

Klein enrolled in a San Francisco cosmetology school. Then she entered a program at the International Dermatology Institute

for advanced studies.

When her friends were all relocating to Portland for its beauty, Klein and her family did the same. By this time, she'd run spas in other locales, but felt Portland would benefit more from a wellness center

Klein wanted to offer memberships. A number of her services would be purchased as a package deal. Her members could then simply drop by for prepaid services at their convenience—or call for emergency treatments when whacked-out by stress.

Klein protected, or "marked" her membership concept. Then she hired women from around the country specializing in a variety of massage techniques. "Our interviews are rigorous," she said. "Everyone on the staff meets with an applicant and we all say 'yes' or 'no'."

"But once they're in," Klein said, "I'm very protective of my staff. If they aren't 100 percent happy, I'm doing something wrong."

Doing things right involves educating the Aequis staff. Next month Klein will

## Aequis

■ **Owner:** Megan Klein.

■ **What we do:** Provide comprehensive spa services

■ **Location:** 1306 N.W. Hoyt St. 503-223-7847

send them to the Upledger Institute to study CranioSacral massage therapy. "We're going to incorporate that into every one of our treatments," she said. Paul Greenbaum, a local expert in Thai massage, will come in-house to train her staff. "He's the expert. The only person to teach that in the West."

Initially the Aequis membership concept was a slow pick-up. "Then I opened the spa to anyone to try individual services," Klein said. "That took away the commitment risk. Membership purchases tripled. Then we decided to assert that you don't need to be members to come here ... but members get additional discounts." Memberships increased another 10 percent.

Careful to control growth, Klein worries that increased size could ruin her concept. "We have to be really careful," she said, "especially in the spa business which is really fickle. I think we have to stay with what we're good at." Large companies have called, for instance, to bring key employees in to bond together and relax. Men purchase expensive memberships for themselves. But the spa really targets individual women, offering a place where they can leave their to-do lists behind and ease into the task of taking a break. □