Hunter establishes Nantucket site of NorthEast Health Services

It is not often that patients can request and receive house call visits these days, but that is one of the key elements of NorthEast Health Services which became established on Nantucket during the fall.

"We come to the client," said Meg Hunter, former executive director of A Safe Place for eight years and now outreach coordinator for the island's NorthEast Health Services, which has another outreach center in Wellfleet and clinics in Taunton, Plymouth, Duxbury and Middleboro.

NorthEast offers individual, family and group therapy, psychological testing, psychiatric evaluation and monitoring, assists people having relationship issues, substance abuse problems, trauma and grief, eating disorders, depression and anxiety. All services are reimbursable through most major insurance providers.

Services are by appointment by calling 325-0380. Hunter said there are no set office hours. Though she may be working off-island on Mondays she checks phone messages regularly and will return calls as quickly as possible. Clients are seen in the location of their choice.

Hunter, who has a master's degree in social work and is a licensed independent clinical social worker, began her career with the Nantucket Counseling Service, had her own counseling practice for six years and is certified in forensic evaluation of sexually abused children. Though she is currently the only employee of Nantucket's branch of NorthEast, other licensed clinicians and a psychiatrist will be interviewed to expand the office, and Hunter has already spoken with a nurse practitioner who is interested in joining on.

— Mary Lancaster

LEADING LADIES

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tending and an owner. We tried to keep it the same because we had a great clientele to begin with, but we changed a couple of things on the menu and have more specials and events. We got an entertainment license so we could have bands and we've done New Year's Eve parties which we never did before."

Reflecting on their and other women's successes on the island, McCutcheon said she believes that Nantucket has an open-minded community and a population of women who are strong of spirit.

"I think Nantucket is really unique," said Collette. "I've always believed Nantucket has this instant karma to it — that you are responsible for how you interact with people, and as a result of that I think Nantucket has a community that is very supportive. I think it's very inspiring. I've had an opportunity to work for some great women on Nantucket and I think it helped give Meghan and me the incentive to do this. We are very grateful to be involved in the community. It has taken very good care of us."

SHERRY HOLT

Dr. Sherry Holt was a veterinarian at Nantucket's MSPCA hospital for two years before deciding in 1999 to start her own business. Holt, who also has a master's degree in business administration in marketing, first launched a small office in her home and was primarily engaged in making house calls. She has continued that service to this day, finding it to be a huge assistance to working pet owners or the elderly.

In the spring of 2004, Holt was finally able to finish building her own clinic on Macy Lane with lots more space for prescription pet foods and supplies as well as a treatment room, a surgical room and an extra room used for a variety of purposes. She has a mainland surgeon who visits and also does orthopedic work, but most of the time Holt is on her own making near-daily house calls for standard innoculations, check-ups, allergy treatments and illness care not requiring the specialized equipment she has at her clinic.

When she left the MSPCA, she had a small following of clients who knew of her plans; today Holt's patient base totals more than 3,000 animals owned mainly by year-round residents. Though she agrees that women are widely represented in Nantucket's business community, she also sees how in recent years women have gained increased respect and status across the nation.

"I think it's kind of a trend everywhere," she said. "I was chairman of the conservation commission in the town I came from, and that was 10 years ago. I think women are getting out there more. Opportunities have opened up. Michigan State University in 2000 graduated the first all female veterinary class in the country. The average veterinary school now is 70-to-75 percent female. It is shifting away more towards women."

SHEILA O'BRIEN EGAN

In 1984, Sheila O'Brien Egan bought Swain's Travel Agency from Nancy Swain. Egan was an employee at the time but had been dreaming of her own business. The agency was then located at 57 Old South Road, where Egan stayed until 1991 when she bought a condo unit at Keypost Corner and moved the business there to allow more space for operations.

When Egan assumed the agency, tickets were still being hand-written and reservations were made by

Meghan McCutcheon and Trish Collette

phone. She said she was the first in the local travel industry to install a computer reservation system and then develop a computerized customer data base. She also extended office hours so the agency was open on Saturdays, and began ensuring that she and her staff had continuing education in travel industry changes to educate clients on issues relating to security after 9/11 and anything else they needed to know.

"The travel industry has changed dramatically. We keep up with that through technology and relationships with suppliers," she said. "I've seen airlines come and go, but if you give your customers good service they will come back to you. I love to travel and share my experiences and make [clients'] dreams come true.

"Nantucket is a very welcoming community," she added. "It is probably the most welcoming community I've ever had a chance to live in. People respect each other, whether it's a man or a woman who own their own business. If you do a good job people will respect you and support your business. One of the most important things is the customer service you give your clients."

DEBBIE FRAKER

When a horrific fire destroyed most of the Zero Main Street building housing The Lion's Paw in December 1979, Debbie Fraker joined in just to assist owners Dan and Nancy Bills reestablish their business.

"I never left," said Fraker, who at the end of 2006 bought the business after learning the ropes of retailing from all the years she worked for the Bills and going from sales person to store manager.

The Lion's Paw, carrying furnishings, linens, tableware, lamps, rugs, art and decorative items for the home, has not changed a great deal since Fraker took ownership, other than the installation of new flooring and moldings and a reconfiguration of the layout.

"It definitely has the same feel," said Fraker. "Everybody is still here who worked here and we cater to our clientele we've had for years. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. Everybody has been very supportive, which was nice for me."

Fraker talked about how her vision to have her own business was fulfilled, and how the island is supportive of independent businesses, particularly, it seems, those run by women.

"The atmosphere on Nantucket is very responsive to women and it is conducive to having a business because there is help everywhere you look," she said. "I think it's a very comfortable place for women to be in business. When I first started this you could pick everybody's brain and they were very supportive.

" I'm certainly hoping I will find someone who is younger and would like to learn and be part of this business. I think that's one of the positive things about Nantucket — that businesses can continue. I would like to be able to do that for someone, and I also think it's very good for our daughters because they are growing up in a positive environment for women so they are confident in what they can achieve."

DR. MINDY LEVIN

Chiropractor Dr. Mindy Levin started her business with her former husband in 1990 but in 1993 she opened her own business on Bartlett Road. To be certified, a potential chiropractor needs four years of college science courses and another four years at a chiropractic school that coordinates with an internship. Levin said it is still a male-dominated career, but she is happy she began her own practice and has worked hard to improve her services to patients.

"It is really a big responsibility to be a doctor," said Levin. "People come to you looking for advice and you are really responsible for the advice you give them."

Levin, who is a primary health care provider trained in reading X-rays, has also studied pediatric chiropractic procedures and can adjust infants and young children as well as being able to assist at births.

"My practice right now is all women," she said, explaining that she employs another female chiropractor and acupuncturist as well as an all female staff. She is currently in the process of studying the biochemistry of menopause and premenstrual syndrome and building her own office at a new location.

"That is huge," she said of the undertaking. "My parents told me I could do anything and I believed them. But I also think Nantucket attracts a really special group of people who are more open and that's why we're all here. I think people have found a little haven on the island and we create our own community. I think, in general, women are more gentle and nurturing and people seek that out."

STEPHANIE CORREIA

Fittingly, Stephanie Correia has always had her store on the former Petticoat Row, famous now for where women began and flourished in business during the whaling era. She first opened at 44 Centre St. in 1997 and for the last nine years has welcomed customers at 7 Centre St., where she has changed her inventory and practices to suit shifting island trends and demands.

Initially, Correia sold gifts, but when she relocated to her larger space she was able to include furniture, lamps, clothing and shoes.

"The store has evolved into one-half home decor and the other half is geared to women," she said, adding that she does not believe in a size two for women's clothing. As part of her expansion, she is now also offering personal services for home decorating.

"My whole concept is that I'm not looking to hit the home run. Slow and steady wins the race. Though the rent keeps rising I try to keep the prices [at levels] so there is something for everyone."

It seems to Correia that while men on Nantucket are holding down the building trades, women are easily able to hold down other businesses, and do the job well with lots of community support.

"We are all still married to men in the trades. Most of our husbands bang nails," she said. "The trades are still very alive here, therefore we as a resort all cater to the people visiting. With women merchants, it is a natural progression for us to be in the service industry."

Next week: Women leading Nantucket's nonprofit organizations.