

Deborah Alexander, Staff writer

Six years ago, Julie Allen had a color analysis done that changed her life. Using the four-season approach, the color consultant identified Allen as an "autumn" and the colors that worked best for her. "I felt confident and empowered," Allen said. When she returned to work in the human resources department at People Pottery in Pittsford, co-workers noticed and complimented her appearance.

Kerry Stich, one of Allen's co-workers, also went for a color consultation. The consultant identified Stich as a "spring," but she felt the colors were not her. "The bright colors overpowered me," Stich recalled. "People saw the clothes and not me."

The women, who are cousins, wondered about their color analyses and began researching the system. They discovered that the four-season system, developed 20 years earlier, was limited and failed to account for individuals who fell between the seasons. New technology behind color analysis identifies 12 seasons, which offer a wide range of colors fine-tuned to allow for a version of every color in season. In a second color analysis, Stich was identified as a "true autumn."

Personal color consultation, the women said, saves time and money when shopping for clothing because the person buys colors and clothes that work for him or her. With this new information, Allen and Stich in September 2005 opened Bella Bleu Color, a personal color consultation studio, at 32 1/2 Main St. in Pittsford. Allen and Stich developed a business plan and financed the studio with their personal savings. A privately held business, the women declined to disclose annual sales.

Last month, a second Bella Bleu Color location opened inside B.A. SNIPS, a hair salon at 2091 Five Mile Line Road in Penfield. Allen, 47, of Penfield, and Stich, 43, of Pittsford, noticed that more of their clients were coming to the Pittsford studio in large groups to have color consultations done as part of a girls' night out or birthday celebration.

This led the women to look into partnering with similar businesses that complemented the services they offered. Also housed in the Penfield building is a massage therapist, aesthetician and barbershop. Barbara and Enzo Lombardo have owned and operated B.A. SNIPS since 1982. Barbara Lombardo said the arrangement with Bella Bleu is working well. "You're dealing with image and beauty," she said. "That's what's good about these related services: It's one-stop shopping."

Bella Bleu's clients, primarily women, tend to range in age from 30 to 55, and about 10 percent are men. During a 90-minute consultation, which is by appointment only, Allen and Stich discuss face and body shape, accessories and compare different colored drapes under a full spectrum light. The consultation is \$125 for women and includes a seasonal tone profile, cosmetic consultation and a personal color swatch book. For men, the cost is \$100 without the cosmetic consultation.

To complete the consultation at both locations are jewelry and accessories made by local artists and the Bella Bleu Color cosmetics line.

Word of mouth has helped build the business. That's how Jamie Burruto of Pittsford learned about the studio. The 51-year-old works from her home in sales for a Temecula, Calif., provider of online interactive courses for adults. Burruto, who wore mostly black because it was easy to pair with white, learned about Bella Bleu Color from a friend who had used the service. "It's so easy to put a wardrobe together," Burruto said. "I don't have to worry about how I'll look on the road." Stich said that in today's tough economy, a business like Bella Bleu Color makes more sense, not less. After an analysis, "you only buy what you need and only what works," she said.

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