

ALL ABOARD THE



When an ill person's ability to leave home for a beauty service is compromised, the Beauty Bus Foundation is there to help. Here's how you can too.

By **Karen Wilhelmsen**

Having the ability to get up in the morning and go to a hair appointment is a luxury we take for granted. For those fighting illnesses like muscular dystrophy, a trip to the salon isn't just low on the list of priorities—it's an uphill battle simply getting out of the house. When people aren't able to groom themselves, their confidence can reach an all-time low. That's where the Beauty Bus Foundation comes in. Offering in-home beauty and grooming services ranging from haircuts and hairstyling to nails and makeup since 2009, Beauty Bus gives homebound men, women and children of all ages something to smile about.

IN LOVING MEMORY

"Our family started Beauty Bus in memory of my sister Melissa," says cofounder Wendy Marantz Levine, who started the organization with her cousin, Alicia Marantz Liotta. Melissa Marantz Nealy passed away in 2005 from a degenerative neuromuscular disease when she was 28 years old, six months after marrying her college sweetheart.

"Melissa was a total girly girl who loved to get her hair done and spend a day at the spa. When she got sick, she really wanted to be able to do those things, but it was hard enough getting out for doctor's appointments," Levine says. Back in 2005, there weren't apps available to Nealy to help find local stylists willing to perform at-home services.



Wendy Marantz Levine,
cofounder of Beauty Bus

Plus, a lot of stylists weren't emotionally equipped to help sick clients or weren't willing to travel, Levine says.

After looking for an organization that would offer at-home grooming services to patients, Levine hit a dead end. So, she and Liotta founded the nonprofit Beauty Bus Foundation and began helping clients a few times a month.

After sending out a press release about their newfound endeavor, Levine and Liotta were overwhelmed at the response from local news outlets that wanted to help spread the word. "We knew we were onto something," she says.

Levine, an attorney who was nine months pregnant at the time, left her full-time job as director of litigation at a legal firm to give her undivided attention to Beauty Bus. Using her previous experience with pro bono work assisting the elderly, poor and disabled, Levine says she already had knowledge about asking professionals to offer their skills to make a difference in people's lives. "There were all these patients and families going through really difficult times, yet everything was all about the quality of care and medicine; their whole lives were about the disease. We really wanted to be able to give people an escape from that," Levine says, adding that Beauty Bus regulars are referred to as "clients," not patients. "We're really trying to bring dignity when people are sick."

LENDING A HELPING HAND

Beauty Bus provides clients (and their caregivers) in greater Los Angeles County battling the following conditions: ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), cancer, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, Parkinson's disease, spinal cord injuries, stroke and other neuromuscular and motor neuron diseases. Clients have access to 12 complimentary services per every 12 months.

In early 2012, Beauty Bus extended its assistance by instituting Bags of Beauty, a service which provides chronically or terminally ill clients and their caregivers with bags filled with beauty supplies. Beauty Bus has some corporate sponsors, but welcomes donations. "After every

In late 2012, Beauty Bus also began holding Pop-Up Salons by partnering with Ronald McDonald House, City of Hope, UCLA Mattel Children's Hospital, Children's Hospital Los Angeles and Providence Saint John's Health Center in Santa Monica. "We go into the hospitals, take over the conference room for a day and turn it into a salon—with music playing and stations for hair, makeup and nails for patients and caregivers," Levine says. At a recent Pop-Up Salon at Saint John's, around 10 beauty professionals performed 91 services in three hours. National Pop-Ups have also occurred in cities like Chicago, Las Vegas, New York City and Dallas.

"There's a need for the services we're providing—and it's always free to the clients."

service, clients are given a Bag of Beauty with all donated, full-size products valued at around \$150. We really try to customize it to the needs of the client," Levine says. "We rely on the generosity of the beauty industry for those products because we don't buy any of them."

MORE IN STORE

In early 2018, Beauty Bus announced the integration of its newest program: Beauty Series. Starting with visits to Saint John's hospital once a week, Beauty Series allows volunteers to enter clients' rooms to provide customized beauty services.

SAVE THE DATE

BEAUTY DRIVE 2018

SATURDAY, APRIL 14

This year's Beauty Drive 2018 event will be held on Saturday, April 14, from 2 to 5 p.m. at the Guerin Pavilion at the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles. "Beauty Drive is a chance for our supporters to experience what our clients' experience," cofounder Wendy Marantz Levine says. Attendees can get glammed up by undergoing the hair, makeup, nail, braiding, brow and lash services offered to clients. This year's Lifetime Achievement Awardees are Manic Panic's Tish and Snooky Bellomo. "Snooky's a cancer survivor, and they're strong women entrepreneurs whose business just turned 40," Levine says. "My sister Melissa would have been 40 in November, so her birthday and the start of Manic Panic coincide. They're also two sisters who went through a journey together."



Snooky (L) and Tish (R) Bellomo



Beauty Bus delivers smiles with complimentary in-home beauty services for homebound men and women.



Beauty Bus services patients in the hospital, too.



Melissa Marantz Nealy inspired the nonprofit.

"Hospitals are excited to be thinking more holistically, and to be offering more wraparound services for families," Levine shares. In a supportive setting, Beauty Series provides patients with multiple services, plus a Bag of Beauty so that the pampering can continue.

Currently, Beauty Bus has roughly 250 active volunteers who have accomplished more than 15,000 hair, makeup, nail and facial services free of charge. Though Beauty Bus would like to expand in the future, Levine says, "For now, on any given day, there are 50,000 patients within LA who would qualify for our services—plus their caregivers. So, statistically, we should be helping 100,000 people a day. Until we really feel that we're meeting the need in LA, we're not looking to expand outside. We think there is still a lot of expansion to do just within our city." ■

DONATE TO BAGS OF BEAUTY

Do you have full-size, unopened, non-expired beauty products you'd like to donate to men, women and children in need via the Bags of Beauty program? If so, you can ship products to the Beauty Bus office at 2716 Ocean Park Blvd., Suite 1062, Santa Monica, CA, 90405.

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