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THE BUZZ ON BUSINESS

Milk and honey add to homey feel at Rosa Azul salon

By David Maggiotto

Over the years Dobbs Ferry resident Rosa Gomez has worn many professional hats. She once owned a small business that dealt in African-made figurines, and has worked as a customer service representative for a large bank. She briefly acted in Spanish-language TV shows filmed in Miami, and was a real estate agent for Prudential in Hastings. Most recently Gomez has returned to one of her true passions: styling hair.

In September Gomez opened Rosa Azul Salon & Spa at 100 Main Street in Dobbs Ferry. The salon offers women's and men's haircuts and hair treatments, as well as facials, pedicures, and manicures, and waxing services. Gomez calls it "the first Dominican salon in Dobbs Ferry."

"A lot of people look for Dominican people to do their hair, because we know how to work with all types of hair," she said in an interview from her salon last week. Gomez, 42, obtained her cosmetology license from Manhattan's New International Beauty School in 1999, but some of her techniques are traditional methods she learned in her native Dominican Republic.

She can apply a raw egg treatment, as well as avocado, milk, honey, banana treatment, or cucumber treatments (all \$25). These treatments do not employ processed extracts out of a package; they involve Gomez applying the fresh, edible ingredients to the client's scalp to promote healthy and moisturized hair. "These are the conditioners my grandmother used, and I like the idea of going back to that," she said.

Gomez's salon also employs more modern methods, such as Nexxus coloring and Keratin hair treatments. Basic women's haircuts are \$60 to \$80, depending on the hair length, and men's cuts are \$25. Facials are available courtesy of Lisa Cutrupi, an aesthetician who works from one of the salon's two rear rooms. Gomez administers hair-waxing services in an adjacent room, and Cookie DeMartino, an Ardsley resident, works in the salon as an assistant.

Also employed at Rosa Azul is Laura Diaz Gomez, Rosa's 9-year-old daughter. "She is the manager," Gomez said.

"I answer the phone, I do the cash register, and I sweep up when my mom is cutting hair," Laura clarified. During the day she is a fourth-grader at Concord Road Elementary School.

In 1983, when Gomez was 14, she left the Dominican Republic to live with her father and older siblings in Manhattan (her mother, whom she remains close with, visited the family frequently but never wanted to permanently relocate). Gomez did not know



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Owner Rosa Gomez and her 9-year-old daughter, Laura Diaz Gomez, who serves as the manager.

any English when she arrived, and took ESL classes at Brandeis High School. She graduated in 1988 and enrolled in literature classes at Hunter College to gain fluency in English.

Gomez married at 18, and while in her 20s she and her then-husband ran Grill Trading Inc., a storefront in Queens that sold African figurines and other foreign goods. The couple had a son, now 20, and ultimately sold the business. Gomez started a new career, as a customer service representative for Dime Savings Bank, but did not love it. "I was born wanting to try different adventures," she said. "Some people are born to work 9 to 5, but that's not me."

Gomez's next adventure was beauty school. Her first stylist job was with Elizabeth Arden Red Door Spa on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. She left while pregnant with Laura, and instead of returning negotiated a deal to own her own salon, Beautiful Me,

located on West 109th Street. While running the business the building was purchased by Columbia University, and Gomez was unable to renew the lease in 2005.

Gomez and her daughter briefly moved to Miami where Gomez tried her hand at acting. She found a few parts as an extra in telenovelas for the Telemundo network, but soon she was back in New York working for Paramount Companies, a distributor of professional hair and beauty products. Gomez did Nexxus coloring demonstrations at international hair shows in which she worked alongside well-known stylists such as Martino Cartier and Kim Vo.

In 2009, Gomez tried one more career change and obtained a real estate broker's license. She was a realtor for Prudential Riverside Homes in Hastings, and later for Prudential in Dobbs. She continued doing her friends' hair out of her home, and

decided that being a stylist made her most happy. "When I was doing real estate, it was more about trying to make money; here it's all about making people feel good," she said.

In June she found a long-vacant storefront at 100 Main Street. She enlisted the help of her brother to paint the interior blue (azul is Spanish for blue, her favorite color) and to help install a hair-washing basin. All of the salon's furniture was purchased secondhand at warehouses, the Salvation Army, and even a garage sale, leading Gomez to refer to her space as "a recycled salon."

"I really like the antique look," she explained, and all of the tables, display cases and chairs appear to be from old, high-quality wood. Gomez said it was essential to recreate the comforts of home in her workspace. "I wanted to bring my kitchen to my salon," said Gomez, who offers clients coffee and other refreshments before and after treatments.

A self-described "people person," Gomez relishes the secondary role taken on by many neighborhood hairdressers. "When people ask my opinion they listen to me," she said. "I listen to a lot of stories, and I tell people my stories, too." She is quick to point out that these personal exchanges with clients remain confidential. "A big mistake of hairdressers is to make gossip. Whatever is said in this chair stays in this chair," she explained.

Gomez believes the price of her haircuts, which include a shampoo, blow dry and five-minute scalp and neck massage, are reasonable, but she is willing to go lower for the right customer. "I could not say no to an old lady who only had \$15 to spend," she said, adding that she has already made such concessions. "I love old people," she added, "so for them I will do anything."

Rosa Azul is open Monday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Thursday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Walk-ins are accepted, but appointments are preferred. More information can be found at rosaazul.com.

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