

Much More than Cosmetic

Paramedical tattooing helps people present their best self.



by Lynn Crandall
photograph by Jim Grossman

Vicki Tilton, owner of
Paramedic Cosmetics,
in her studio.



A diagnosis of breast cancer seven years ago may have slowed down Vicki Stogsdill for a while, but she tackled her treatment with her mind on living a full life. After recuperating from a double mastectomy, she got fitted with a prosthesis that gave her a natural appearance.

However, the prosthesis proved to be heavy and she felt there had to be a better way to live. For her, that better way included breast reconstruction that gave her back the natural curves of a woman. And paramedical tattooing—a procedure provided by Vicki Tilton, owner of Paramedic Cosmetics—gave her breasts natural-looking pigmentation without having to undergo more medical procedures with subsequent recuperation. Today at 60, three years after her reconstructive surgery and tattooing, Stogsdill is comfortable in her own body, enjoys a feminine appearance, and celebrates seven years of being cancer-free. The paramedical tattooing of her areola (pronounced “ah ree’ la) area was a central piece in obtaining closure on that part of her life, Stogsdill said.

“Number one, it was very professional, it was a job well done,” she said. “And it was local, so I didn’t have to travel to Peoria or Chicago. Vicki

was very professional and she provided excellent aftercare. Her work really did finish the procedure and make everything far more realistic. I’ve been very happy with it. ... Women need to know about the alternatives and investigate different options. This was the right one for me.”

Tattooing

According to the Society of Permanent Cosmetic Professionals, permanent makeup applications typically include permanent eyeliner, eyebrows, lip liner, and lip color. Whether referred to as permanent makeup, permanent cosmetics, or micropigmentation, the procedure utilized is a form of tattooing—the implantation of colored pigment into the skin.

Although tattooing dates back to ancient times, cosmetic tattooing has evolved in the United States only within the last 25 years, said Vicki Tilton, who first began exploring permanent makeup about 20 years ago. As a licensed cosmetologist and owner of Fox and Hounds Hair Studio and Day Spa in Bloomington, Tilton was used to helping people achieve their best look. But the concept of “permanent makeup” intrigued her because of its permanence. Since no one locally was involved in the service, Tilton had to look beyond Bloomington-Normal to learn about the service. She found a woman in Dallas,

Texas, who was willing to share information, and eventually Tilton became certified as an independent technician doing permanent cosmetics.

Standards for permanent cosmetic applications are regulated by professional organizations and the state of Illinois. Technicians are knowledgeable in application procedures, topical anesthetics, patient aftercare, care of the tattooing machine, sterile and sanitary procedures, and blood-borne pathogens standards.

While some people may consider cosmetic tattooing an expression of vanity, Tilton sees it very differently.

“Cosmetic tattooing does carry some controversy, especially since it is tattooing, which is something that has not been part of the mainstream. But it’s only when people don’t understand what it is and the benefits of it that it gets a bad connotation,” Tilton said. “It’s all about the self-esteem boost it gives someone. I can’t stress that enough.

“I remember doing a consultation on an older woman in her late 60s, early 70s, and I remember her saying, ‘I would love to hug my grandkids without worrying about my eyebrows coming off on their cheek.’ And I thought how sad, because how many women out there, grandmas, are maybe seen as cold, not very cuddly, and maybe that’s all it is. It’s hard for me to describe how much it helps

a person feel so much more confident.”

Paramedical Tattooing

It didn't take long after she began offering permanent makeup solutions to people that Tilton made good on a promise she made to herself when she was 21 and her mother had just died of breast cancer. She vowed to do something worthwhile and make a difference in the world. Her business, Paramedic Cosmetics, became her way to fulfill her vow. Through her business, she camouflaged scars and created the illusion of pigmentation in clients who had vitiligo, or loss of pigmentation, and loss of hair from alopecia. Areola-nipple repigmentation was another procedure she really wanted to do, but her attempts to work with physicians for referrals initially went nowhere.

“I first talked to a plastic surgeon in Bloomington and he flat out told me there wasn't any need for it. I tried another surgeon and he wasn't interested. This was the thing I really wanted to do and there was no way I could without referrals, even though insurance will pay for it,” Tilton said. “Finally, one day I heard from a physician who told me he was so glad to find someone in Bloomington-Normal who knew what was going on out there in the world. I pulled the phone away a moment and said, ‘Thank you, God!’ The physician was very respectful of me and we developed a wonderful partnership.”

Since that initial physician acceptance, Tilton has worked with a number of local physicians, including Dr. Laura Randolph and Dr. Chad Tattini at Twin City Plastic Surgery, accepting referrals of men and women who have undergone breast surgery but prefer not to have more invasive procedures to regain normalcy. Dr. Randolph said surgeons are opting to recommend paramedical tattooing as a component of breast reconstruction

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over extensive skin grafting because it's a lot less painful for the patient, it's faster since there's far less recuperation involved, and it doesn't have to be done in the operating room.

“We send a lot of people to Vicki after I'm finished with the breast reconstruction. I usually at that point have done a nipple reconstruction, which gives them a mound that looks like a nipple. But what patients need to complete the reconstruction is some tattooing of the areola-nipple complex to restore pigment,” said Dr. Randolph. “Vicki puts the finishing touches on what has been a fairly long reconstruction process for the patient and puts a positive end to it

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and makes things look more realistic.

"That's why people undergo breast reconstruction. It's not a requirement, but for a lot of people it restores their figure. And the tattooing is sort of the final step in helping them feel more whole and complete and in restoring self-esteem."

Randolph said paramedical tattooing by Tilton is completely safe and professional. She added that some surgeons use nurses or estheticians to provide tattooing services in their office, but she and Dr. Tattini prefer to refer patients to Tilton.

"Vicki does her tattooing in a very professional studio with standards of a licensed professional, so I have no qualms about sending people to her," Randolph said. "We like the team approach with somebody else in the community who runs a business, and it's nice that it's outside of the medical setting. It makes people less nervous. It's a pleasure to work with her and we enjoy a nice relationship with her. Hopefully we'll continue to enjoy that relationship for many years."

Claiming Life

Tilton takes pride in her work and the ability she has to restore and enhance a man or woman's life. Whether she applies permanent makeup for women with vision problems or who can't hold a makeup brush because of Parkinson's disease or arthritis, or repigments a former cleft lip area or breast, Tilton enjoys helping people claim their life and enjoy it more fully.

"I absolutely love doing it. People just glow after the work is done," she said. "It's so rewarding."

For more information, visit Vicki Tilton's Web site at http://centralillinoisproud.com/content/paramedic_content, Dr. Chad Tattini's Web site at www.chadattim.com, or Dr. Laura Randolph's Web site at www.laurarandolph.com.

Quick Facts

- The first step to learning more about permanent or paramedical cosmetics is to schedule a consultation with a certified technician.
- Some discomfort during a cosmetic tattooing procedure is expected but the level of discomfort differs from individual to individual and topical anesthetics are used.
- Clients of cosmetic tattooing include both genders, all ages, and all walks of life.
- Most cosmetic tattooing applications retain color for up to five years, but factors such as sun exposure and generalized health can affect duration of the pigment.

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