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Local spa focuses on the health benefits of massage

By Diane Claytor



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A dimly lit room. Relaxation music playing softly in the background. The slight scent from an aromatic candle. Warmed sheets and blanket surrounding you. Strong hands slathered with oil begin easing those tense muscles in your back and neck. The only thoughts in your head are "ahhhh. This. Feels. Incredible."

This is what you could be feeling after experiencing a healing and therapeutic massage at Lafayette's Sanctuaire - or at any of the other Lamorinda spas or massage facilities. (A recent search for local spas, massage therapists and facials produced the names of dozens of resources - everything from high-end spas to individual practitioners who will give you a massage or facial at your house.)

Massages and facials, sometimes thought to be mere pampering treats, are so much more. They can be powerful tools to help take charge of your health and well-being. Even the famed Mayo Clinic says that

"massage is ... increasingly offered along with standard treatment for a wide range of medical conditions and situations." Studies have shown massage is an effective treatment for reducing stress, pain and muscle tension and, the Mayo Clinic reports, it may also be helpful for anxiety, digestive disorders, fibromyalgia, headaches, insomnia, soft tissue strains, sports injuries and some forms of joint pain.

Best Health magazine goes even further, reporting on a 2010 study that found a massage can boost a patient's white blood cell count, relieve tension headaches and improve cardiovascular health, as well as lower heart rate and blood pressure. It also increases the production of endorphins, the body's natural feel good chemical. And well-beingsecrets.com reports that facials, while basically skin beauty treatments, also improve blood circulation, help prevent skin from aging, detoxify and hydrate and lower stress levels.

Ann Crahan, co-owner of Lafayette's Sanctuaire Spa, may not go so far as to make all those claims. But, as a massage lover herself, she certainly appreciates both the pampering and relaxation benefits of a massage or facial treatment, or, as she calls it, "my very own 50- or 80-minute getaway."

Crahan and her husband, Michael, purchased their favorite Lafayette spa in 2016. An RN, Crahan fully understands the benefits of de-stressing, and had visions of expanding the services of the spa, which "we're on our way to doing," she reports. Last year, Crahan changed the spa's name to Marilyn Monroe, joining a franchise created by hospitality industry veterans and former Walt Disney executives. "Not having a background in this type of business," Crahan, who is a clinical systems analyst RN at a local health care facility, said, "I thought this was a good way to start." A year later and learning that the Lamorinda community embraces independent businesses and entrepreneurs, Crahan has separated from the franchise, renaming the facility Sanctuaire Spa (French for sanctuary).

Sanctuaire, which is undergoing a refresh, refers to itself as "your French country oasis in downtown Lafayette." It continues to be a one-stop shop, offering hair and nail appointments, massages and skin treatments and using all organic, all natural products. They have also begun doing HydraFacials, which, according to Crahan, uses a patented technology to cleanse, extract and hydrate. "The HydraFacial uses a super serum made with nourishing ingredients that create an in-stantly gratifying glow," she said. New Beauty magazine reported that the HydraFacial, which they described as a "microdermabrasion and facial, all in one," produces "a flawless look." The spa also has a sauna, steam room and a couple's Jacuzzi tub which, Crahan said, may be enjoyed before or after a massage treatment.

Within the next few months, Crahan said Sanctuaire plans on adding a med spa, overseen by a dermatologist. They will offer injectables, fillers, "possibly laser treatments and cool sculpting," she said.

In today's hectic, often crazed, world, who couldn't use a little relaxation, de-stressing and even pampering?

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