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Hairstylist Brynna Marie Garrard volunteers her services to cancer patients through Hairdressers with Heart.

Stylist Donates Talent for Chemotherapy Patients

By MARK DIPAOLA

WETHERSFIELD - When Brynna Marie's Garrard's high school friend Brandi McWade was diagnosed with breast cancer, she, like anybody else in that situation, was determined to make a difference.

Luckily for McWade, and other cancer patients everywhere, the answer was within Garrard's talent as a hairstylist--the East Hampton resident runs a salon right in Wethersfield--as a provider of free wigs for those undergoing chemotherapy, which is known to cause hair loss.

Garrard got the idea from Nicole Hitchcock, another hairstylist based in California, where McWade lives. Hitchcock founded Hairdressers with Heart toward the end of the winter this year.

"They kind of started the program based on [McWade's] issues," Garrard said. "I heard about it when it started through Brande, [and] when she came to Connecticut to visit I went to a benefit for her."

By March 20, Garrard had brought the campaign to her own state in the form of Connecticut's branch of Hairdressers with Heart based out of her own salon on 526 Silas Deane Highway in Wethersfield. Right now she's working on it solo, but hopes to build a team of like-minded hairstylists.

"The more the merrier," Garrard said. "It's important for me to get the word out. It's still in the process of getting bigger and getting more hairstylists."

She's also looking to extend the services she provides to more patients--Garrard admitted that because the project is in its infancy, she is not yet working with a lot of patients.

But there are some, and Garrard works to juggle providing free services for them while tending to her regular customers.

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“It’s not bad time management-wise,” she said. “My other clients are very understanding. If I have particularly sensitive cases, I’ll come in when the salon’s closed.”

Along with the physical and emotional toll of battling such a devastating disease, chemotherapy patients often struggle to cope with the inevitable hair loss that comes with the treatment. Every case is, at least on some level, sensitive. That’s where Garrard and Hairdressers with Heart come in.

“[They’re] trying to have a normal life while they’re getting treatment,” Garrard said. “It’s really big for self-esteem and having a life that’s somewhat normal. It really helps them feel positive.”

Hairdressers with Heart provides pro bono hair treatment, as well as wigs and wig maintenance services for cancer patients. Garrard is in the process of collecting donations to provide the wigs for patients that qualify based on financial need.

Garrard has been a hair styling professional for nine years and is an instructor at Paul Brown and It&ly Hair Fashion. Interested patients can visit www.hairdresserswithheart.org for more information on how to get started.

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