

Kalispell salon enterprise gets a makeover



Karen and Doug Thurston pose for a photo outside their Ciao Bella Salon in Kalispell on Wednesday, Sept. 1, 2021. (Casey Kreider/Daily Inter Lake)

Eco-friendly and cruelty-free retail and hair care products are for sale at Ciao Bella Salon in Kalispell on Wednesday, Sept. 1, 2021. (Casey Kreider/Daily Inter Lake)

Styling chairs are ready for clients at Ciao Bella Salon in Kalispell on Wednesday, Sept. 1, 2021. (Casey Kreider/Daily Inter Lake)

By

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September 5, 2021 12:00 AM

With changes coming to two local salons, their owners are aiming for a productive transition.

Starting this weekend, Tracy Anderson is consolidating her business into the Amore Salon location at 230 First Ave. W. in Kalispell.

Karen and Doug Thurston are taking over the original Amore site on Fifth Avenue West and converting that salon into Ciao Bella Salon.

Anderson, who launched Amore 14 years ago, said she hopes the changeover will feel "organic."

"It was time for me," said Anderson, who has been in the industry for more than 25 years.

A decade has passed since she expanded into a second salon. Since then, Anderson decided she wanted a smaller footprint and a slower pace for her business.

She said she receives hundreds of calls from interested clients, even though she hasn't taken on anyone new for the past 10 years. By downsizing, Anderson expects to be able to narrow her focus.

Going forward, Amore will specialize in hair.

"It will be small, elite, very custom, VIP," Anderson said.

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the space that housed Anderson's first salon, the new owners are embracing growth and change.

"Part of our decision was tied to all the development happening here," Doug Thurston said.

He and his wife Karen turned the Fifth Avenue salon into Ciao Bella Salon because they were excited by planned developments in the downtown core. The old railroad tracks are being turned into a pedestrian trail, and developer Mick Ruis plans to build apartments, retail space and a restaurant around the grain silos there.

Right now, Ciao Bella has a team of five people, three of whom were with Amore, but the Thurstons hope to eventually quadruple that number. The building was built to accommodate a second story, which they'd like to add in the next few years.

The couple is confident about the potential of Ciao Bella, even though it's new territory for them. Neither Doug nor Karen has ever worked in the salon industry before.

But Doug has worked with independent contractors in Washington for almost 40 years, and Karen's roots in the valley go back five generations. They believe their experiences, and their willingness to learn, will put Ciao Bella on the path to success.

"We trust that you know your business," Karen said of the hairstylists, massage therapists and estheticians who work in the Ciao Bella space. "We want to support and promote and help you grow."

The Thurstons hope Ciao Bella will be a "well-rounded" salon that caters to every discipline in the beauty and wellness world. But the services aren't their only focus.

A big draw of the Fifth Avenue building is the ornate Italian architecture. In fact, the flooring was imported from Italy. The Thurstons would like to share the unique space with the community by opening it up as an event venue.

"A lot of people love this space and this location," Karen Thurston said.

She suggested the salon could be used for events such as bridal showers and birthday parties, giving guests a chance to get their nails done during events. Or, Doug Thurstan said, the chairs could be cleared out to host cocktail parties or art shows.

"It's a special place," he said.

Ciao Bella Salon is at 35 Fifth Ave. W. and Amore Salon is at 230 First Ave. W.

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