

Boutique has options for breast-cancer patients

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Published: 23 October 2009

Breast-cancer patients seeking specialty garments have few options in Bergen County, especially with the recent closing of two Hackensack post-mastectomy shops. Because of local “blue laws” making Sunday business hours rare, Sabbath-observant women have even fewer choices.

Englewood resident Arline Schwechter is aiming to fill the void with twice-monthly Sunday hours at her new Suzanne Breast Care Boutique at One West Forest Ave.

On Oct. 28, she’s hosting an open house to introduce Suzanne’s, a substore of her Astoria Surgical Supplies showroom that recently moved to a 6,000-square-foot space.

“Our mastectomy salon has expanded,” said Schwechter. “We are the only one that accepts assignments, and we have fabulous fitters and fantastic, ‘young’ merchandise.”

The boutique is named for Schwechter’s 24-year-old daughter, an assistant buyer at Macy’s Home Store who recently became certified to make custom mastectomy forms. Suzanne Schwechter, a Moriah and Frisch graduate, plans to work with her mother on alternate Sundays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

“There has been a demand from people who are shomer Shabbos [Sabbath observant] or who can’t make it here during our weekday hours,” said Schwechter, an occupational therapist and certified mastectomy and orthotic fitter.

According to Teaneck-based Sharsheret, a national support and information organization for young Jewish women facing breast cancer, one in 40 Jewish women of Ashkenazi descent carries specific altered genes that may increase her risk of developing the disease, compared to one in 345 women in the general population.

Items women need after breast surgery may include breast forms, custom prostheses, and specialty bras (including strapless), and camisoles. Many of these products have integrated drainage systems and/or compression to ease lymphedema — swelling from an accumulation of fluid after lymph nodes have been removed or blocked by surgery or radiation therapy.

Schwechter said that federal health-insurance guidelines allow a post-mastectomy patient to receive a prosthesis every two years and six specialty bras each year.

She opened Astoria in 2005 to provide a boutique-like shopping experience for customers needing any sort of medical supply or accessory — from wheelchairs and commodes to shoes for diabetics and luxury linens for hospital beds. Since then, she’s expanded to include the mastectomy salon as well as Braceworks, offering over-the-counter and custom braces fitted in cooperation with orthopedic surgeons.

Astoria also sells “Shabbat scooters,” electric mobility vehicles featuring an electronic scanner mechanism developed in Israel that enables operation without violating restrictions on the use of electricity on the Sabbath.

Schwechter said she is adding items recommended by local obstetricians for pregnant and nursing women, including compression stockings and maternity bands, “to fully service clients as they go through pregnancy and any other changes in their lives.”

Another new product line is wigs, scarves, and hats — not for religious purposes, but for chemotherapy patients. Some insurance plans cover such accessories, said Schwechter, who accepts Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance from New York and New Jersey. Post-mastectomy swimwear and lingerie also are planned new inventory items.

The Wednesday open house, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., will be highlighted by free topical presentations:

At 10, Nancy Ellson, a nurse at Holy Name Hospital’s Center for Healthy Living, will discuss “Wellness and Well-being Pre and Post Surgery.”

Amoena consultant Andrea Goldsmith is to showcase the brand’s newest breast forms and pads at 11 a.m.

At noon, Englewood Hospital Medical Center physical therapist Orna Krause will address “Symptoms and Treatment of Lymphedema After Breast Surgery.”

Dr. Rosalyn Stahl, an Englewood Hospital pathologist, is to speak on diagnosing breast cancer, at 2.

The final speaker, at 3 p.m., is Dr. V. Merle McIntosh, an Englewood Hospital breast surgeon, who will discuss breast-cancer treatment trends.

Goldsmith and Schwechter will be available by appointment throughout the event for consultations and fittings. Call (201) 569-8033 to schedule a slot.