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***Beautician starts
'hair for kids'
organization***

By Laura Dempsey

Just when a patient needs all the strength she can muster,

her hair falls out.

And Becca Sanford steps in.

Sanford, a beautician for 34 years, knows that looking good goes a long way to feeling good.

To that end, she decided in June to use her well honed wig-fitting and styling talents to give some normalcy to young lives sorely in need of it.

Her organization, Hair for Kids, was born in June when Sanford learned that many of the wigs donated to sick children weren't being worn.

"It seems they didn't fit, we're uncomfortable, or we're maybe the wrong color" said Sanford.

"For a wig to look natural, it's got to be custom-made to order and the colors picked real carefully.

"Even then, when a wig comes in, it has to be cut and styled to the person's face or it will look strange." If Sanford knows anything, she knows wigs. Fifteen years ago she educated herself about hair replacement in an effort to help disguise her mother's "really awful thin, horrible hair." In those 15 years, Sanford has seen the popularity of wigs come and go, while technology continued to improve the product. "And I know," she continued, "because if I was going to do wigs, I was going to wear them. I've been a redhead, blond, dark-my husband doesn't know who he's going to come to."

Alice, who asked that her last name not be used because "not everyone knows I wear one of these things," is a long time client of Sanford's. She wears the full wig prosthesis to cover her thinning hair, and said the job done by Sanford is second to none.

"I tried other people before, and they just didn't do the kind of work she does.," Alice said. "These are sophisticated things..They're just very comfortable. They're lightweight and just very comfortable. She does a great job; she's very conscientious."

After deciding to become involved, Sanford contacted the

Children's Medical Center, which agreed to refer kids in need of temporary hair replacement to Sanford's salon

on Wilmington Pike. Sanford was going it alone, navigating

Confusing IRS rules and seeking grants and donations to defray expenses, when she connected with the Dayton Foundation, a well-established organization that offers support -both financial and organizational- to individuals involved in charitable enterprises. The custom wigs retail anywhere from \$800 to \$1,100; Hair for Kids operates on a sliding scale tying a patient's contribution to family income, and Sanford said the most anyone would have to pay is \$200. She volunteers all her time, the salon space and equipment.

The cutoff age is 19, and Sanford has found that little kids don't seem to care (about their hair loss). It's teenagers who really want to look good. I mean, it's bad enough to being in high school...imagine being in high school with *cancer!*

Pam Byer, a medical social worker at Children's, is excited about the new program.

"When a child loses their hair, it's a very difficult aspect of cancer treatment, and certainly a visible reminder of the struggle they are enduring," she said. "Having a nice quality hair piece is very important to self esteem, to help them feel like them selves as much as possible. This is a great new resource."

A patient come to Sanford for several exact measurements, selecting the style." They can come in what's called a 'free style' or with a part that's kind of built in- once its there its there- and color from among myriad samples that run the gamut - "If we want four colors blended in one piece, they can do it."

She sends the specifications to Caring Touch in Minnesota, which constructs the custom-made wig with human hair. In six to eight weeks, the finished product arrives and the patient comes back for a fitting and a cut, if needed, followed by one more visit to touch things up.

"If they use medical adhesive, they can go swimming in the wig, stand out in a windstorm, tornado, whatever, and it's not going to budge," Sanford said. For everyday use, two sides tape is more practical, and Sanford advises sleeping in the wig, though it can be done. The piece will last until the patient's own hair grows back "usually about a year" she said.

"I've worked with adult chemotherapy patients before," she said, "and I know it can be hard on an adult. When a kid going through this, it's tough tenfold."