

Hands-on healers: Wellness center awarded RBGA Business of the Month

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By FRED POLLARD
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EAST ALTON - The Healing Touch Wellness Center has been recognized as the River Bend Growth Association Business of the Month for September.

"We definitely want to thank the (RBGA)," owner Winona Gossett said. "It was really nice to be on the radio (with director of member services Joell Aguirre) as she listed the things we have done with the RBGA over the years."

Gossett opened the Healing Touch Wellness Center at 56 S. Ninth St. in February 2006. For the last four years, the center has provided deep tissue massage, stone massage, ear candling and reflexology to hundreds of area residents looking for relief.

Gossett said the current state of the economy has brought in clients suffering more tension than ever before.

"People are cutting back in other areas, but not with their physical therapy," massage therapist Heather Buhr said. "They know how important this is."

"The number one problem today is stress," Gossett added. "People don't realize just how much stress can damage the body. We have clients who say they cannot afford out-of-town vacations and are setting aside 'spa days' for themselves."

Gossett boasts 25 years of experience. She spent 18 years in the home health department of St. Anthony's Hospital as a registered nurse, five years with Bethalto Chiropractic, and one year with Sandles Spa. She said she opened her own massage therapy center to provide clients with the quality of care they deserve.

"A good therapist can do any type of massage that the client needs them to do," Gossett said. "They will tell you what they need; you just need to listen."

"Above anything else, people just want to be listened to. They don't want to just pop a pill anymore. People are looking for alternative medicine, not drugs."

According to the Web site, Healing Touch Wellness Center "will help you on your way to decreasing stress, tension and pain while increasing circulation, endorphins, immunity and accelerate healing."

Gossett herself performs up to 10 massages per day and specializes in deep tissue massage for athletes and sports injuries.

"I have more male clients than women," she said. "I give a very deep massage. Men sometimes have a hard time finding someone who has the strength and stamina to give deep, effective massages. It takes finding their pressure points. You have to be careful not to hurt them and yet still be effective."

In addition to aggressive healing massage, many other services are offered including less intense massages for less severe needs. The staff also is trained both in infant as well as geriatric massage.

Gossett said the effect of massage therapy often is underestimated. She said many clients feel significant relief after just one session, and a visit to a massage therapist can be much cheaper and faster than a doctor's visit.

"People know they can come here and get relief right away," she said.

Attempting to add "little touches" to help clients get the most out of their sessions, guests are provided with a quiet atmosphere, soft music, heat packs, and warmed beds in the winter.

"We always try and make it as relaxing as possible," Gossett said.

With cold and flu season already raging, therapist Buhr says massage therapy is vital as it helps boost one's immune system.

Rounding out the Healing Touch team are therapists Claudia Murray, Diane Gossard and Christina Copeland and receptionist Angie Rodgers.

For regular customers, bundle packages provide discounts on multiple massage appointments.

"People love our packages," Gossett said. "It is nice to give massages, mark the appointment, and (the guest) can leave without having to stop and pay."

Package one offers five one-hour massages for \$200, at a savings of \$50. Package two offers three half-hour massages for \$75, at a savings of \$15. Gift certificates also are available.

Earlier this year, the wellness center expanded its operations to Alton, where the Something Else hair salon, 2722 Brown St., now offers massages through Healing Touch. Therapist Diane Gossard provides services at that location on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

Healing Touch is located at the top of Ninth St. hill in East Alton and is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. until 7 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. Appointments can be made by calling (618) 259-9434 and more information is available by visiting the Web site at www.htwcmassage.net.