

# PERMANENT CHANGE

Nurse-entrepreneur helps clients feel better about their self-image **BY SANDY KEEFE, MSN, RN**

● ● ● BY ANYONE'S STANDARDS, Ellie Stephan, BSN, RN, has had a rich and rewarding career. Beginning as an ICU/CCU nurse in Wisconsin, Stephan went on to work as an inservice director in Fairbanks and Anchorage, AL, a clinical instructor in Milwaukee and a workers' compensation nurse case manager in Denver and Los Angeles. Today, she is the sole proprietor of Ellie's Permanent Cosmetic Make-Up in Palm Desert. "Here I am, a small-town girl from Wisconsin doing tattooing in sunny California," she laughed.

Stephan's interest in permanent make-up began in 1988 when she received a flyer in the mail. "The flyer asked, 'How would you like to make \$1,000 per day?' At the time, I was driving around Los Angeles freeways trying to get injured workers back on the job, and the offer sounded pretty intriguing. My eyeliner was always running as I played tennis in the hot California sun, and I knew other women had the same issue." Stephan immediately signed up for a permanent make-up course in Irvine and then practiced her craft on friends and family.

## New Adventure

Stephan prepared conscientiously for her new career, spending 2 years perfecting her techniques before going into business for herself. Her artistic background as a water colorist was useful as she called her friends and said, "I can make eyebrows that look like real hair" or "How would you like to have permanent eyeliner or lipstick?"

As she gained more confidence in her skills, Stephan obtained a business license as a tattoo artist and took the plunge. In the early days of her business, she rented space in a boutique that used to be a tanning booth, and paid 10 percent of her gross earnings for rent. Today, she shares a suite with an esthetician in a renovated dental office on Highway 111 in Palm Desert.

Stephan considers herself a permanent



Ellie Stephan, BSN, RN

make-up professional, and belongs to the Society of Permanent Cosmetics Professionals. "I get my liability insurance through that organization and have to adhere to some very strict standards of practice included in the organization's Code of Ethics."

Stephan is emphatic about being a professional in her work with the public. "This is not a Tupperware party! You need to apply permanent make-up in a place of business, with a clean environment and with sterile needles," she stressed. "You need to follow proper hand-washing techniques, use barrier tape appropriately when working on the face and follow other infection control measures." Stephan uses only pigments designed especially for the face that she purchases from a reputable company.

The majority of Stephan's clients come in

through word-of-mouth from satisfied customers, although she does run periodic advertisements in newspapers and at the local Sun City Retirement Community. "It takes a long time to build up a clientele," she remarked. "You can't open up your own business and expect it to be an overnight success — you really have to work at it!"

As a permanent make-up professional, Stephan is proud of the contribution she makes to the self-image of her clients. "It's a life-altering experience to put permanent brows, eyeliner and lips on someone's face. People want to get up in the morning with their make-up already in place, and I can provide that gift for them." Many of the skills she uses as a make-up artist came from her earlier nursing experiences.

## The Nursing Connection

"It was a fabulous transference of skills from nursing to permanent make-up," Stephan said. "Can you imagine how frightened a client can be facing this type of procedure? I educate people over the phone when they call to inquire, and I reassure and educate them throughout the procedure."

As an RN, Stephan is very aware of the risk of communicable disease during skin punctures. "I took an OSHA course on bloodborne pathogens and volunteered to have the Riverside County Environmental Health Department inspect my office on a yearly basis. That's not a requirement in California, but I wanted validation that I have a clean and professional place of business."

Stephan's clients value her nursing skills and are reassured by her experience. "Being a nurse makes me a good permanent make-up artist," she asserted. "And that credential conjures up caring, knowledge and skill to the clients I serve."

After 15 years as a nurse-entrepreneur, Stephan has come to savor the flexibility and independence in her life. "I can't imagine ever being in any other situation again! I love my boss — she tells me I can play golf whenever I want to, or I can come to work at 10 in the morning after working out in the gym!" ■

*Sandy Keefe is a regular contributor to ADVANCE.*