

## Newtown salon owner rewards academic success with spa treatment

By [Katy Bergen](#)

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A week after her father died in 2014, Sherri Pines stood in an unfinished space on the corner of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way and Lemon Avenue, surrounded by painted walls and newly-stained floors.

It would take another six months for Pines to officially open her first salon, S&S Ward's, in a mixed-use building in Newtown. And a little longer to achieve another goal -- to give back to neighborhood children the kind of support and encouragement her parents had given to her.



STAFF PHOTOS / THOMAS BENDER

Rodney Sexton gets a makeover from Warren "Reddz" Anderson Saturday morning during the Brains to Beauty event held at S&S Ward's Salon in Newtown. Rodney, 8, of Sarasota says he wants to be an astronaut when he grows up.

On Saturday, Pines hosted her first "Brains to Beauty" event, for nine children who participate in the Better Tomorrows after school program operated by Derrick Kirce, the associate director of youth and family services for the Janie's Garden apartment complex. Next week, high school girls graduating from a course at the Robert L. Taylor Community Complex in Newtown come in for free makeovers.

Growing up, Pines, 32, says she was a stubborn child with a "big mouth," bored by lessons and always in trouble. Now, she's a business owner who owes her success to family members who kept her focused and made sure she didn't leave school. She thought about that a lot when local kids would stop in, look at the sleek black nail stations or take a seat on the plush couches and talk to her about their lives.

"We talked, and decided our focus would not only be on the salon," Pines said. "It would be a place where people would say, 'There's nothing like that in Newtown.'"

Together, Pines and Kirce planned "Brains to Beauty," as a way to reward students with good grades and behavior. Kirce kept the salon event, which included haircuts, make-up, pedicures and manicures, secret until Friday.

"A couple of them jumped up and down. Some of the girls screamed," Kirce laughed. "To say they were happy and ecstatic was an understatement."

On Saturday, Khmarious Phelps, 7, and Quintin Dipina, 10, waited patiently for a turn in Warren "Reddz" Anderson's chair.

"We were very excited," said Quintin, shyly. Usually, a relative or a friend cuts his hair "in a house," he says. Across the salon, Amiya Rutledge, 8, got her first pedicure. Amiya loves art, but wasn't doing well in other classes until recently.

"My grades were down here," she said as she pointed to her knee with freshly painted teal and navy blue nails. "And now they are here."

She lifted a sparkly hand to her head.

## 'This is it'

Pines took her time deciding what she wanted to do with her life. She'd intended to pursue law, but started as a business major at the University of South Florida. By her junior year, she switched to communications, but spent time working for her family's law firm in Virginia and car dealership in New York during the summers. Later, she'd change focus again, making plans to open a laundromat with a coffee shop attached to it. Then, the economy tanked, and soon, her father's health started to decline.

During this time, she researched the beauty industry. Her then-boyfriend was interested in launching something too, and suggested Sarasota as a location. She remembers driving past a sign advertising commercial space on a scenic drag of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way. She called her mother, "I think I've found it." By May 2011, she had signed a lease.

"I told her, 'You want to be in a place where there are people who you know might want your services, and who will want to support business,'" Pines' mother, Melody, said.

Then, another setback: her father was diagnosed with stage four pancreatic cancer in 2013. He died on June 8, 2014. That Saturday, Pines was back in the salon.

"You get the salon open and you make sure your brother and sister study for the MCATS," her father had told her. (Both Pines' siblings are pre-med students at USF.)

Pines would love to see Newtown revitalized and become like the downtown area, where visitors stop and stay for awhile, shop in boutiques or stores, get lunch or take care of appointments, she says. But her biggest priority? Building a staff that is connected to the community, and willing to support it.

Engrid Gipson, 41, lives in the apartments above the salon. A Sarasota native, she grew up in the Nokomis area and was between jobs when Pines opened shop here. She knocked on the door and asked to be a part of the business. She started with cleaning, but when the staff learned that she could braid hair, they chipped in to pay for a certification class. Now, she does a little bit of everything.

Gipson smiled as she worked Saturday, and hummed along to music as kids hopped in and out of chairs and Pines moved from station to station, making sure every child was attended to.

"This is giving back to the community," Gipson said. "They may go out and do what we're doing for someone else. Lead by example, that's how I always look at it."

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