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12,096.26	2,350.62	\$1.2736 (VS. EURO)	\$598.20 (N.Y. MERC)	4.64% (5-YEAR)

NEW ATHENS GRANT: B3
ST. LOUIS DANGEROUS: B3

BUSINESS MONDAY

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STEVE NAGY/News-Democrat

Licensed massage therapist Kelly Crocken-Figi massages Sandi Von Bank at her downtown Belleville business. Crocken-Figi is also a certified massage doula who cares for expectant mothers.

Massage therapist takes a hands-on approach to healing

Discovers unique niche giving comfort to cancer survivors

By SCOTT WUERZ
News-Democrat

When Kelly Crocken-Figi decided to become a massage therapist, she wasn't worried about helping other people relax as much as she was worried about trying to relieve some of her own stress.

"I was a financial rep in the banking industry and it was really stressing me out," Crocken-Figi said. "I needed a change, and massage therapy was something that had interested me for a long time."

Last year, Crocken-Figi opened her own office in a quaint, old building at 10 S. Church St. in Belleville. Inside, soft lighting, the smell of incense and soothing new age relaxation tones greet patients.

Crocken-Figi said she studied massage therapy with the idea of focusing on women's issues. She planned to do prenatal massage to help expecting mothers deal with the stress and pain of carrying their babies. But she didn't anticipate treating women who are cancer survivors. She is studying to become a physical therapist to broaden the assistance she can give her patients.

"I learned techniques that really help women who have had mastectomies due to breast cancer," Crocken-Figi said. "I can really help with lymphatic draining and range of motion for them."

Once word got out about the pain relief and improvement in movement Crocken-Figi offered her patients, doctors started to refer to her patients with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a degenerative nerve condition better known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

"It's a little bit tough when I work with patients who have terminal illnesses because I know I'm going to become close to them and eventually I'm going to lose them," Crocken-Figi said. "But it's very rewarding to be able to make them more comfortable and help them make the most out of the time they have left."

Crocken-Figi said she is unsure how her business grew by helping patients with cancer and ALS. But word of mouth has spread from doctors to patients and she gets requests from new patients all the time.

Still, she said she makes time for more traditional patients who just need to unwind.

One client, Sandi Von Bank, said she doesn't know if she could get by without the soothing massages she gets from Crocken-Figi on a weekly basis.

Von Bank, a military reservist stationed at Scott Air Force Base and an emergency room registered nurse at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Belleville, said the combination of two high stress jobs would be too much without Crocken-Figi's deft fingers.

"I come here to make the whole week just go away," Von Bank said. "When I come in I'm all tense and tied up in a not. And sometimes I just float out of here. I told Kelly if I get sent someplace else that I'm packing her up and taking her with me."

Crocken-Figi said she doesn't usually take walk-ins. She schedules her patients ahead of time, then locks up the shop while they are in session to avoid any interruptions.

But, since she works by appointment, Crocken-Figi said she doesn't work standard office hours.

"I come in when people need me to be here to fit their schedules," Crocken-Figi said. "I do Saturdays, Sundays and evenings."

A 30-minute office massage session costs \$40, an hour is \$60 and 90 minutes cost \$80. Chair massages cost \$10 for 10 minutes, \$20 for 20 minutes and \$30 for 30 minutes.

For more information about other services or to schedule an appointment, call Crocken-Figi at 235-8853.