

# Certification produces skilled hair colorists

Hair color is the No. 1 service driver for salons, and **Andre Nizetich** has dedicated his career to elevating hair colorists' expertise. Twelve years ago, he joined together with a group of distinguished hair colorists to form the **American Board of Certified Haircolorists (ABCH)**, a 501(c) 3, non-profit organization with the mission of establishing a higher level of hair colorist to whom consumers can turn for high-quality, professional hair color. They invested eight years in developing a hair colorist certification process and exam, and today, there are 1,565 board certified hair colorists across the country. The organization also produces its annual **Energizing Summit**, which Andre calls "the crown prince of hair color education." **Beauty Industry Report** recently had the opportunity to chat with Andre, who is president of the ABCH, to learn more about how the industry can become involved in these initiatives.

**BIR: Andre, before talking about the ABCH, please provide BIR's readers with a short recap of your career.**

**Andre Nizetich (AN):** I am what is referred to as a "war horse." I earned my license in 1957 and have been engaged in the industry since then as a hairdresser, educator, guest artist, salon owner and manufacturer. This is a great industry with a lot of opportunity. When I started in the industry, rollers were just coming out, so I have lived through a lot of changes.

**BIR: How did you become interested in hair coloring?**

**AN:** Shortly after beauty school, I invented **Super Streak**, a tool for adding streaks and highlights to the hair. I then hit the road, along with my partner, teaching people how to use it. Because it was a hair coloring tool, I was asked a lot of questions about hair color that I didn't have the answers to. At that point, I decided I had better learn hair color if I was going to teach it. I went to as many classes as possible, but I just got more confused. So, I decided to learn hair color on my own. I even purchased a microscope to view what was going on. What I learned astounded me. The teaching was filled with old wives' tales and lacked the truth. I

wanted to change that.

**BIR: Please provide some brief background on ABCH and the criteria you use to promote the credibility of the hair colorist and the quality of the work done in salons.**

**AN:** I am the president of the organization; we have a Board of Directors, whose members participate in any major decisions made in behalf of the organization. We started ABCH to establish a higher standard for professional hair coloring. We all know there are folks out there who are licensed cosmetologists who don't have a clue about doing professional hair color, but that doesn't stop them from offering hair color services to their clients. We want to separate the flowers from the weeds, so consumers

receive the results they desire when having their hair colored at a salon. Of course there are some great hair colorists who are not board certified. That's okay, too. We don't expect the high-profile hair colorists to take the examination, but we would like them to endorse the concept.

**BIR: Many more people color their hair at home than visit a salon. How can our industry work together to reverse that?**

**AN:** The answer to that is simple—changing our pricing. We are pricing ourselves out of business. I taught a consumer hair color class entitled, "Color Your Hair like the Professionals." The class was sponsored by my local community college. It was the greatest promotion I ever did. Obviously, the consumers that attended were interested in coloring their hair. At the conclusion of the class, I asked the question, "Why do you not have your hair colored professionally?" There were two answers—"I can't afford it" and "It's too expensive." Those might sound like the same answer, but they're not. One means, "I don't have the money." The other means "The service

does not justify the price." That is why I hate to see the manufacturers continue to raise their prices, in turn requiring hair colorists to raise theirs. There are those consumers who will pay, regardless of how much is charged, but that is not the norm, especially in this economy. If we continue to raise prices, clients are going to rebel. Our competition is still the drug store, and we are losing clients every day to it.

**BIR: You mentioned that once the ABCH was formed, it took eight years to establish a certification program and give the first exam. What was your process?**

**AN:** It was grueling! Imagine starting with a blank piece of paper, writing a curriculum, then developing an exam. Sometimes we had as



*The 2011 Energizing Summit educators volunteered their time to share pure hair color education.*

many as 10 colorists locked in a room trying to come to terms on the definition for "brassy." Many notable hair colorists were involved in the process. We all entered the fray with the thought we were doing something noble for the industry. We

thought the manufacturers would endorse our commitment—the more qualified the hair colorists, the more hair color those colorists are going to use. We fully expected manufacturers to endorse our program. Instead, they rejected the entire concept. Go figure.

**BIR: It's surprising that ABCH only has 1,575 certified hair colorist members. Would you like to increase that number?**

**AN:** Of course we would like to increase the numbers, but it's a tough exam; our pass rate is below 50%. In administering the examination, we have seen some great hair colorists. On the other hand, we have observed some pretty pathetic work. I think that is a microcosm of what happens in salons. It is not easy to fail as many people as we do, but we refuse to lower our standards just for the sake of getting more board certified hair colorists.

**BIR: Please describe the certification process.**

**AN:** There are no prerequisites other than a

**“We started ABCH to establish a higher standard for professional hair coloring.”**

cosmetology license. We stand on the examination process for determining whether someone is qualified to be a board certified hair colorist. The study portfolio describes in detail exactly what a candidate has to do to pass the examination; there is no guesswork. We enlisted the skill of a professor of vocational education to give us guidance with writing the examination.

**BIR: I understand the Ratner organization, which includes Hair Cuttery, uses your certification program to develop better hair colorists. How does that work?**

**AN:** The Ratner organization has a trainer who teaches the curriculum to those who want to become board certified. They have had a great deal of success using our curriculum to teach their hair colorists. This is not the type of organization in which you have to reach a certain level before you can belong. Rather, it is a tool to help individuals refine their skills and become better hair colorists—and it works!

**BIR: Tell me more about the structure of the ABCH. You mentioned the organization is a 501(c) 3 non-profit corporation. What is the significance of that?**

**AN:** It is an educational non-profit corporation; as such, you can contribute to it and have it become tax deductible. We are an organization formed solely to upgrade the industry. We have nothing to sell—only the

materials necessary to study for and take the examination. We are all about producing a higher level of professional hair colorist.

**BIR: Tell me about your Energizing Summit.**

**AN:** It is a fantastic event! It is two days of solid education for \$300.00. I would say it is the premier hair color educational event. The board of directors produces it in a way that makes learning enjoyable for all of our attendees. We have 45 educators who come to the event to educate, just for the love of the profession. With 23 classes going on at the same time, lots of interaction with the educators and hands-on classes galore, it is a real learning experience. You can select the classes you want online. For the month of February, we offer 20% off tuition as an incentive for registering early. We do have a few exhibitors who sell their wares.

In contrast, look at what is happening to our beauty shows. Of course the major shows offer education, but it takes a back seat to the exhibit hall.

**BIR: Who is on the ABCH board of directors and what are their duties and responsibilities?**

**AN:** Our board consists of five terrific hair colorists—**Kris McGinnis, Paul Morrison, Tamara Dahill** and **Aura Mae**—and me. I pretty much run the show. No one gets paid; they volunteer their time and energy for the betterment of the industry

**BIR: What is fueling the hair color category's growth and importance to salons?**

**AN:** Hair coloring has always been an important segment of the industry. Many have steered clear of it because they understood that you can lose a good client with a bad hair color service. Now, they have embraced it, because as business gets more competitive in other areas, they turn to hair coloring. This is good and bad—good because we have a greater focus on hair coloring in the salon and bad because they are doing it for the money and not for the love of what they are doing.

**BIR: Are hair color manufacturers involved with your organization?**

**AN:** **Wella Color Charm** is the only company that gives us financial support. Many others—**Artease, Chromastics, Compagnia Del Colore, Ion Color, Avant Garde, Malibu** and **Keratin Complex**—cheer us on. In

addition, other manufacturers support us at the Summit. We are very grateful for that.

**BIR: What can manufacturers do to help students and working colorists?**

**AN:** Anything the manufacturers do would be better than what they are doing now. It would help if they embraced our concept for teaching. We are not competing with them—we want to help them.

Manufacturers have to start teaching and distinguish education from entertainment. They have all of the power to make changes. Everyone teaches the color wheel. Why? Because it is the only consistent thing we have in our teaching. The color wheel is useless when it comes to hair color. What good is the color wheel when the manufacturers don't reveal what primary colors are in their colors?

Our education is so fragmented that no one can make any sense of it. Our goal at ABCH was to standardize the education, but that's impossible when we, as an industry, can't even agree on the names of different categories of hair color. We must have a standardized curriculum in order to advance as a profession.

**BIR: What is your vision for ABCH's future?**

**AN:** We are going to keep working as long as we can. We get a lot of very positive feedback from those hair colorists who have studied for and taken the exam. That's what keeps us going. We have eight examinations scheduled for this year, as well as the Energizing Summit. It's going to be a busy year.

**BIR: Any final thoughts?**

**AN:** I think everyone who reads this article needs to look at the big picture and see what is happening to our industry. There are a lot of people making a lot of money, but they are not paying attention to the salon industry as a whole. Salon owners are struggling; we have to help them. Let our industry be your City of Hope. Of course, the City of Hope does great



Andre Nizetich, ABCH president

things, but so do salon owners. Everyone needs to put their heads together and figure out how we can get more clients coming into salons.

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