**Giving Back**

By Karen Shea

It’s true that at Summit Salon Academy of Tacoma the team is focused on providing the highest quality cosmetology education and most innovative techniques and methodologies to a diverse student population. But that is only part of the story of their success.

“We believe that part of the education process should be developing an awareness to help those around you,” explained Academy co-owner Michael Shea. “Students engaged in a purpose higher than themselves always leads to good things. We want to show them that this is just how you do business.”

Summit Salon Academy of Tacoma has a long track record of giving back. The entire Academy- from students to owners- has supported Wings of Karen for several years. The mission of this community-based organization is to fund promising breast cancer research in the Pacific NW. Collectively, the organization is committed to finding a cure, while empowering and educating women with a positive, helping hand. In the spirit of Karen Denmark, Wings of Karen is a resource that shows the strength, courage and beauty of those fighting back at cancer.​

Earlier this month, the rallying cry rang through Summit Salon Academy of Tacoma as they hosted the first-annual Hair BRA-Zaar fundraising event. The April 6 event raised money to support breast cancer research through Wings of Karen and packed the Academy, raising $6,202.

The Hair BRA-Zaar featured auction items donated by local businesses, desserts, and a fashion hair show styled by Academy students and alumni. Teams of students worked to develop the look for each model, and the event culminated in a runway show. Some of the models in the Hair BRA-Zaar were cancer survivors, and ranged in age from 19-62. Many audience members were also cancer survivors, and the event was the latest installment in a long list of ways the Academy has supported this organization.

“We work in an industry that is largely dominated by females, so this is a cause that is particularly important to us. The Hair BRA-Zaar was a fun way to challenge the student’s creativity while demonstrating that it’s important to do your part to help others.”

Another important cause to the Summit Salon Academy of Tacoma team has been the Ms. Wheelchair America program, where they served as the official salon for the reigning 2014 Ms. Wheelchair America, and hosted events to raise money to support her platform. In 2013, the team at the Academy helped prepare a long-time client, Jenny Lynn Adams, to compete for the crown of Ms. Wheelchair Washington and Ms. Wheelchair America. The entire team helped with the initial fundraising process, to ensure that travel expenses associated with the national event were met. Academy alumnus Lindsey Fabela also travelled with Jenny to the competition in Houston to assist with skin and hair needs and styling. Ultimately, Jenny was crowned Ms. Wheelchair America and the Academy continued to support her “Inclusion Revolution” platform with fundraising events and services.

“By supporting this effort, our team allowed Jenny to spread her powerful message throughout the country. We demonstrated that our efforts, no matter how large or small, can lead to much bigger things. The students felt incredibly proud to be part of such a wonderful effort.”

“Another effort that is important to our students and staff is the work being led by the Justice and Soul Foundation. Our students go above and beyond each year to style models in the Fashion SOULstice fundraising event, which is held to support operations at a cosmetology school in Cambodia that provides sustainable skills to young survivors of sex trafficking. It’s inspiring to see how creative and selfless they become.”

And, others have taken note of these efforts. In fact, in late 2015 the Academy was recognized for excellence in the category of Community Involvement by modern salon media’s 2015 “Excellence in Education” cosmetology school recognition program.

“We don’t emphasize giving back for recognition, but our students were humbled by this honor.”

Of course the Academy is committed to providing outstanding education. But the commitment to teach students to look for creative ways to give back, help others, and explore ways they can make a difference is a key component to education.