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CAROLA STEPPER

Owner,
Cascade Acupuncture,
The Dalles

Puncturing medical myths

photos and story by Jesse Burkhardt

Licensed acupuncturist Carola Stepper, the owner of Cascade Acupuncture Center in The Dalles, is steeped in history on two distinct levels. First, she is an expert practitioner of acupuncture, a pain-relieving and healing practice that goes back 3,000 years. And at a much more local and contemporary level, there is a different slice of history in the fact that she houses her acupuncture business in a building that was used as a laundromat from 1966 up until 2010.

She opened Cascade Acupuncture Center in The Dalles in 2006, inside the Medical Arts Building at 414 Washing-

ton Street. She relocated her practice in 2011, when she bought and extensively renovated the former Dry Hollow Laundromat at 1712 E. 12th Street. Stepper, who also owns an acupuncture clinic in Hood River, said she thinks of her ex-laundromat clinic in The Dalles almost as if it was her own child.

"This is my dream clinic. I drew the plans," she said. "It was like a fancy jigsaw puzzle."

Stepper graduated from a four-year master's degree program at the Oregon College of Oriental Medicine in Portland in 2001, and said she was glad she graduated

when she did.

"These days, the program would cost about \$120,000 in student loan debt," she explained.

Cascade Acupuncture Center's overall approach to health care is based in traditional Chinese medicine, which is a holistic model that addresses physical and emotional areas of health imbalances at the same time.

"We have a general acupuncture practice with a focus on the treatment of pain, stress-related health concerns, as well as allergies," Stepper said. "We employ a unique and effective treatment style that involves the insertion of fine, sterile needles only below the elbows and knees."

Stepper's personal background is an interesting one. She was born in New Jersey to German parents, but when she was just three years old, her parents decided to move the family back to Germany.

While in Germany, she graduated as a registered nurse in 1989, and

started going to medical school. But then she decided to make a change.

"I left med school to come to the U.S.," she said. "In my 20s, I traveled to the United States and didn't come back."

Once she began learning about acupuncture, she knew she had found her calling.

"What struck me about acupuncture is that it is so ancient and so simple," Stepper explained. "Continuing to practice medicine with a paradigm that has worked for 3,000 years is fascinating to me."

In 2002, she was Mid-Columbia Medical Center's first staff acupuncturist, a role in which she helped treat cancer patients. Now, more than 15 years later, she believes she has a three-fold role: as an acupuncture practitioner; an employer; and a small business owner.

"Those are three roles I clearly see, and I pay attention to all three," she said.

Stepper said she chose not to have

children so she could focus on her career passion.

"The clinics and business take time, energy, and money," she said. "This is what I'm doing with my life. My clinics, clients and employees get my full attention."

Stepper pointed out that Cascade Acupuncture provides three distinct services. Acupuncture, custom Chinese herbs, and allergy elimination.

"I love what I do. Since being an acupuncturist, I've never come back from a vacation where I did not look forward to getting back to work," she said. "I am planning on doing this until I retire."

One of Stepper's loyal clients is Mary Collins, a resident of The Dalles who has been visiting Cascade Acupuncture for the past two years.

"I come in for various different reasons, but I had a hip replacement, and before coming here I was in a lot of pain," Collins said. "A friend of mine told me to try it for pain."

Collins added that "she's not a fan



Mary Collins, a client at Cascade Acupuncture, receives acupuncture treatment in The Dalles from business owner Carola Stepper. For more information about Cascade Acupuncture Center, visit the website: www.cascadeacupuncture.org.

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of needles,” but acupuncture is very different from the needles usually identified with medical treatments.

“It’s very relaxing,” Collins said, “and I feel better when I come out. People need to try it out.”

Stepper said that reminded her of a line she often hears from new clients.

“‘Why did I wait so long?’ I hear that a lot,” Stepper said. “But everybody has their own process.”

Stepper’s two clinics share a total of three acupuncturists, including herself, who, at one site or the other, provide acupuncture treatments six days a week. Stepper has a great deal of office support, highlighted by Jacki Powell, Cascade Acupuncture’s office manager at The Dalles clinic. Powell, who was born and raised in The Dalles, has been there for the past 10 years and has provided a steady and friendly presence to greet those who come in.

Nevertheless, Stepper’s administrative responsibilities are taking up an increasing amount of her time, and she is usually available to provide

acupuncture treatments in The Dalles only one day a week.

“Currently, I have one day in The Dalles, two days in Hood River, and two administrative days,” she explained.

Stepper pointed out that acupuncture is “ancient, safe, and effective,” and is intensely passionate about the service acupuncture provides.

“People worry about needles, but I can put five of my needles into one of the type of needle used to draw blood,” she said, adding that Cascade Acupuncture offers free consultations.

“That’s how many people come to us,” she said. “We always do free consultations. There is no charge and no obligation.”

Stepper also expressed enthusiasm about the local farmers’ markets in Hood River, The Dalles, and White Salmon.

“We have chosen to be one of the main sponsors of the farmers’ markets,” she explained. “They represent everything I believe in: food is



Carola Stepper moved from Germany to the United States while in her 20s, and later launched Cascade Acupuncture Center, which has offices in The Dalles and Hood River.

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medicine, and I want to support local farmers and the local economy and encourage others to support them. When I have a cause, I’m not subtle.”