



# Passion For Style, Commitment to **The Highest Standards**

By Meghann Dibrell

**A**s the preeminent salon in San Antonio, K. Charles & Co. has not only raised standards in the world of beauty, but in environmental leadership and responsibility. As an Aveda Lifestyle salon, K. Charles & Co. focuses on building a brand with a vision to do business consciously and sustainably. Their innovation and emphasis on education has enabled them to grow successfully, and there are now three K. Charles & Co. locations serving the Stone Oak, Alamo Heights, and Bulverde areas.

Kathy Thalman, founder and CEO of K. Charles & Co., grew up in the cosmetology business watching her mother build a progressive salon in a suburban area of Tulsa, OK. She moved to San Antonio in 1980 and, after working as a stylist in an Alamo Heights salon for three years, opened the first K. Charles & Co. in 1984. She was determined to build a business with two major goals in mind: to provide a rewarding platform for talented stylists to shine and to be a leading example of community involvement, locally in San Antonio and around the world.

Destined to follow in her mother's footsteps, Thalman's daughter, Holly Zapata, trained at the original Aveda Institute in Minneapolis before returning to San Antonio to work in her mother's salon in 1990. With a background in construction management, Thalman's son, Chase, joined the business in 2004 as systems manager.

"I think having a family business adds a lot of warmth, humility, and humanity," Thalman said. "Each of us brings different value to the team and we each have our strong points."

Zapata took the lead in redesigning the salon's educational training programs, which in turn affected the entire salon's atmosphere.

"Under her education leadership we decided that to do business correctly, we had to have a vision and a culture, and we had to have a set of standards by which we were going to operate," Thalman said. "We knew early on that in order to be successful we needed a comprehensive training program in the salon; this led us to our next venture: our own Cosmetology Institute."

The Aveda Institute San Antonio opened at the historic Pearl Brewery complex in 2005. Offering education to those entering the cosmetology field, Aveda Institute San Antonio has quickly become one of the best institutes in the U.S. and abroad, with more than 600 graduates since its opening.

"The success of our San Antonio institute provides us and other area salons with well-educated professionals," Thalman said. "Our students come from great distances to attend our school and it became clear to us that a large portion of our state is underserved when it comes to quality cosmetology education. That knowledge led us to a forthcoming venture . . . the establishment of Aveda Institute Corpus Christi. This new Institute will serve potential beauty professionals from all of South Texas and the coastal bend. Chase is leading the development and construction in Corpus Christi with a team of dedicated professionals who understand our vision and commitment. We plan to start our first class in mid-October of this

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— Kathy Thalman, Founder & CEO

year."

"With our educational training, and the fact that most of our new stylists are hired from among Aveda Institute San Antonio graduates, it makes for a more consistent application of the services we provide and the type of salon we want to be," said Zapata, now Director of Education for both K. Charles & Co. and Aveda Institute San Antonio. "Our guests know there is consistency in our training, so we can service them without ever having to turn someone away because one of our stylists is not available."

"Our guests can comfortably go to any one of our stylists at any time," master stylist and Stone Oak salon manager Chris Bentsen said. "Because they have been through the same training, we are able to offer consistent service."

Guests can also often benefit from more than one person's expertise at once, as stylists often consult with and assist one another on the same guest.

K. Charles & Co. offers three levels of stylists from which customers may choose: junior, senior, and master. Bentsen says that stylists at all three levels are guaranteed to provide a quality salon experience because of the extensive training and apprenticeship program each stylist completes. Working as a stylist at K. Charles & Co. requires a commitment to ongoing education and research to ensure guests are receiving the best service with the most current looks at any given time.

"This industry is constantly evolving," Thalman said. "What you learned yesterday is going to become old hat tomorrow and if you're not constantly staying on top of what is cutting-edge in this industry, not only in the United States but around the world, you're going to be left behind. We put a lot of emphasis, time, and a lot of our budget toward education for our staff."

"Our stylists, estheticians, and nail technicians have great consultations with customers," Zapata said. "Guests come to us to hear options from a professional. We work as a team to find new ideas and trends, and it becomes fun because we can offer those variations."

Thalman is extremely proud of her entire team at K. Charles & Co. and the Institute because of their strong commitment to community involvement and service. Determined to make a difference in the world, K. Charles & Co. has become involved in several community initiatives including raising donations for the San Antonio Food Bank, providing school supplies for a school in Afghanistan, and hosting Walk for Water.

"Our Walk for Water earth month event this year [was] held April 11," Thalman said.

At the date of this printing, over \$12,000 had been raised in donations from guests and pledges from K. Charles & Co. employees and Institute students; even more was expected on the day of the event. All of the money raised will go in support of the company's local earth month partners – the Gulf Coast Restoration network and Mitchell Lake Audubon Society.

Their services to the community extend to their commitment to conserving natural resources and being conscious of their human footprint left on the earth. The salons and the Institute exclusively use botanically-based Aveda products that are never tested on animals. They have worked with City Public Service to install low-flow hoses in all of their shampoo sinks and the Institute uses 100% Windtricity. Everything possible is recycled, including hair color foils. Thalman and Zapata's steadfast commitment to the environment has permeated the entire company from top to bottom.

"If you set certain standards and that's what you live by, then the people who want to work with you are people who have the same philosophy," Thalman said. "I know that's what sets K. Charles & Co. apart from any other salon. We draw people who have a passion for the industry, a love for their community, and a need to exist in a way that benefits our world. We have a lot of warm-hearted, self-giving people who are extraordinary at what they do."



Chase

Kathy

Holly

**K. CHARLES & CO.**  
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