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A Florida Family Affair

Meet
the South
African spa
owners uniting
their American
community.

When entrepreneurs Judy and Andrew Williams immigrated to Florida from their native South Africa in 2011, the couple wanted to make a new start but didn't know what kind of small business they would take on. They'd never worked in the beauty field before, but they bought Spada Salon & Day Spa in Fort Myers, Florida, because they saw an opportunity to grow a struggling business and embrace a new community.

It was a big gamble—with big rewards. In the years since the Williams came on board, Spada's staff has grown to 55 and the space has expanded to 13,000 square feet, making it one of the region's largest day spas. It now boasts 14 private treatment rooms, a steam room, Vichy room, two lounges, five couples' suites, a nail area, conference room and staff training room.

The Williams have also become active supporters of the Greater Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce and community events, including several local and national nonprofit charities, such as the American Heart Association.

However, it's the spa's locally famous Spada-thon—an annual fundraiser that the facility organizes and hosts—that's most notable. This year's Spada-thon, which raised approximately \$40,000, was held on May 23 to benefit PACE Center for Girls, the Golisano Children's Hospital, the Heights Foundation and Valerie's House, an organization that helps grieving families. In total, the Williams estimate their community cash donations from the events to be \$130,000.

In recognition of Spada's generosity, Judy Williams was invited to join PACE's board, and was named Business Advocate of the Year in 2016 for her outstanding dedication to the Southwest Florida nonprofit community. Here, she tells us more about how she and her staff give back to those in need.



How did Spada become involved in community outreach projects?

It actually began before we arrived. The previous owners held a poker party fundraiser that brought in \$800. During our first year as new owners, we did it again, and it raised a lot of money for PACE. When I first got to speak with PACE it was a powerful moment: Being from South Africa, my husband and I have witnessed firsthand the poverty, strife and hard times people face, but we'd never had an opportunity to do much about it. When we saw how we could use our business to really give back to the community, it was something we just had to do. For the past five years, each event has been bigger and better than the previous one.



COURTESY SPADA SALON & DAY SPA

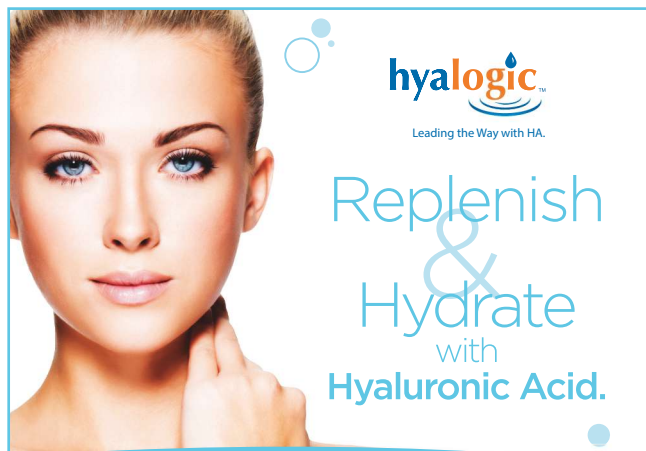


What community needs does PACE serve?

PACE is a day school for girls who are dealing with very serious situations, whether it's sexual or mental abuse, or having incarcerated parents. Some have gotten into trouble with the law themselves, but none of them have been given opportunities. PACE provides them with counseling and a chance to get their education back on track, and helps them see that they can have a future by making positive changes. I get really emotional about this because I have three beautiful daughters—ages 8, 6 and 3—and PACE's girls are daily reminders that anyone can end up in such difficult situations.

How does your big Spada-thon work?

For the event, we convert every room in the spa into a mini boutique before we open the doors to 350 guests. Instead of charging admission, we ask attendees to donate a new or gently worn dress. The Spada team provides mini spa services, and local business owners and vendors pay a sponsorship fee—which is then donated—to showcase their businesses and sell their goods, including clothes, handbags and scented candles, at the event.



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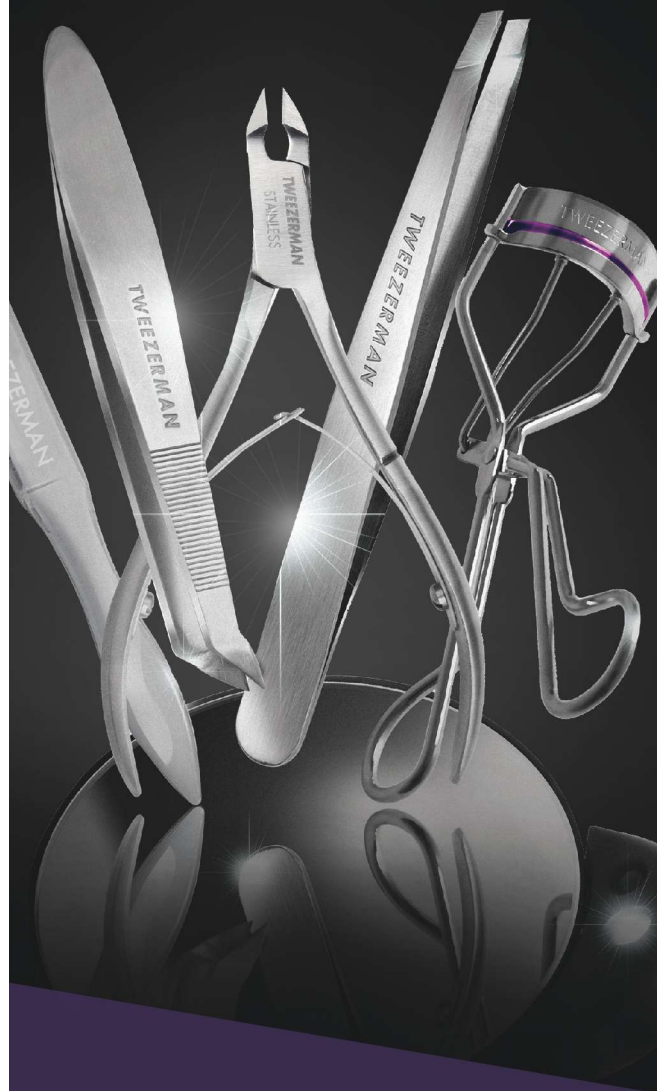
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We host a nutritionist, a chiropractor and a photographer as well. The dresses collected at the door, along with others that are donated by individuals and businesses, then go to to benefit PACE's big annual Love That Dress! fundraiser. The event is attended by up to 800 women and generates even more money for the organization.

How do you put the 'fun' in fundraiser?

Spada-thon includes a D.J., wine, catering, and complimentary sessions with a crystal healer, clairvoyant and tarot card reader, so it really is a fun night. We also hold a live auction of donated items that, last year, were worth \$35,000. Some are one-of-a-kind experiences like breakfast with the mayor or dinner for eight women, cooked by the firefighters at the local fire station. Our entire staff volunteers to give \$15 chair massages and reflexology, \$15 mini manicures, \$10 brow or lip waxing, \$20 wet haircuts and \$10 kids' cuts. In addition, they handle check-in and setup, sell raffle tickets, tend the bar and clean up afterward. It's very much a collective effort.

What motivates you to do this?

So many people want to help others yet don't have the means—but we do. We can open our doors, invite everyone in, and together make a difference for the girls at PACE. And all year long we can say to clients, 'Hey, when you come in for your appointment, please bring a can of food for the local soup kitchen or a little something for the holiday toy drive.' And they do. It makes such a positive impact on our whole community.

It must also mean a lot to your staff who are so eager to donate their time and skills.

It truly does. Event-goers and clients always comment on our staff's upbeat and positive attitude. They're so happy to be helping, and it unites us as a team. We even have people apply for jobs at Spada because they want to be part of a company that cares about the community and gives back. 💜