

Beauty and the budget: Cosmetic procedures still growing nationwide

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While high costs of fuel and groceries may make for an ugly economic outlook, people increasingly are turning to cosmetic treatments to face harsh times with a fresh look.

The procedures are part of a fast-growing industry that earned more than \$8.5 billion last year, said Louis Silberman, founder and president of National Laser Institute, a non-surgical medical aesthetic educator based in Scottsdale.

"The reality is that people will always pay to look good," Silberman said. "People are concerned about anti-aging. The customer is still finding a way to go out and spend those extra dollars to look



good."

Despite the sluggish economy, the number of cosmetic procedures has grown nationwide to 11.7 million in 2007, according to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery.

Including laser surgeries and Botox injections, the number of less invasive treatments has grown nearly 773 percent since 1997, the group says, from more than 1.1 million a decade ago to 9.6 million annually.

The growing customer base and rising jobless rate have many seeking a career in the aesthetic cosmetic industry, Silberman said.

Thousands of cosmetic laser technicians have graduated from courses offered by the institute since it opened in 2003, Silberman said. The company has offices in Las Vegas, he said, and plans an expansion within two years to Dallas, San Francisco, Chicago, New York and Toronto.

About 97 percent of students are women, many of whom are stay-at-home moms or just interested in a career change, Silberman said. Men will undergo treatments, but they aren't as eager for a career in the industry.

"A lot of people that come here are what I call career-change individuals," he said. "They come from a totally different career, they don't come from an aesthetic or medical background, and they want to pursue the health-and-beauty industry."

The institute offers four course packages ranging in price from \$1,000 for instruction in Laser and Intense Pulse Light to \$8,850 for its Comprehensive Laser Plus courses.

The comprehensive course package includes instruction in laser hair removal, intense pulse light photofacials, laser vein reduction, laser tattoo removal and several other procedures.

Each procedure has remained popular with customers willing to cut back on spending but not on trying to stop signs of aging.

Among the top five non-surgical cosmetic procedures in 2007 were laser hair removal with 1.4 million and laser skin resurfacing and rejuvenation with 647,000, according to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery.

The most popular course at the institute is in laser hair removal: A treatment where a beam of light enters the skin, targets and heats a hair's melanin, which prevents the hair from regrowing. Depending on the area, the procedure can take up to two hours and require ongoing visits.

Another fast-growing field is laser skin resurfacing, where the beam of light is used to remove blemishes and other unwanted marks.

As the popularity of the industry continues to grow, so does the educational options for those interested in entering the aesthetic and cosmetic medical field, Silberman said.

"There definitely competitive schools out there, which I love," he said. "Every time a competitor opens, they market to the public . . . (the public) ends up going to the best place with the best reputation, so they basically end up coming here."