

Profile

Haim Knister

Israeli-born hairstylist makes a habit of 'giving back' to his industry and community

By Arthur Lightbourn

It may seem like quite a jump from being a paratrooper in the Israel Defense Forces to becoming a professional hair stylist in San Diego, but for Haim Knister it's been a perfectly natural transition.

Knister, or Haim as he prefers to be called, is the owner of Haim Ltd., a full service hair salon now in its 16th year in the Del Mar Plaza.

We interviewed him recently in his "office" on the public patio outside of his second-floor salon and within a breeze of the ocean.

"Coming from Tel Aviv," his Israeli hometown on the Mediterranean, he said, "I have to have that ocean breeze."

Haim Ltd. Salon was one of the first salons in the area to specialize in color treatments when it first opened its doors in 1992, but since then it has also gained a reputation as being one of the nation's leading Eufora salons, using Eufora International natural and organic products.

Haim is a cool-looking 5-foot-5, 140 pounds, with a full head of graying longish hair, glasses that darken in sunlight and Israeli-crafted silver bracelets on both wrists.

Asked how he keeps in shape, he laughed: "I'm a single man. I work around beautiful women. And I eat healthy. My mom always taught us: moderation. I feel that same way about the business. We're using natural products to take care of ourselves from the inside and out."

The products he uses in his salon are organic, aloe vera-

based products, called Eufora.

"We know what we put on ourselves goes into our system," he said.

Now at 60, he often travels throughout the U.S. and Canada as an "educator" of other Eufora stylists and salon owners, sharing his hair styling skills developed over nearly four decades in the business.

And when possible, he devotes his time and resources to community work.

His parents (his father was a Holocaust survivor) taught him: "Good people do good things for the community. Giving back is not an option. You must do it."

Over the years, he donated his time and expertise to The American Cancer Society's "Look Good Feel Better," program for women facing chemo and radiation therapy, to the environmental project, Hairdressers for a Beautiful World, and fundraising events for Children's Hospital in San Diego.

Most recently, he became aware of Photocharity, (www.photocharity.org), a charity dedicated to providing housing to former foster children after they turn 18 and are out of the system and to other homeless youth in San Diego.

He donated a hair makeover to an inner-city student in the Photocharity program and was moved how much it meant to her.

"We did her hair and what really touched me was the reaction of that girl and how she saw herself so beautiful that she hasn't really seen herself like that in a long time," he said.

He has since offered to set up and donate a small salon in the Photocharity house in Hillcrest. "They like to play with hair and makeup, those kids. And if I can help out one or two of the children and bring them into our industry, that is what I'm passionate about."

Growing up, Haim was one of two boys in his family. His father, a Holocaust survivor who had immigrated to Israel after World War II, was an independent contractor who rebuilt homes and constructed additions.

Haim was introduced to hairdressing as a teenager in his hometown of Tel Aviv. He found work during the summers in a hair salon owned by the brother of one of his best friends.

The owner recognized that Haim had a knack for cutting hair and working with women.

"You should think about it," he counseled his protégé about a potential future career.

After high school, he attended a hair styling trade school and subsequently worked as an apprentice in a hair salon, but didn't make a final decision about his career until after completing his military obligations and traveling around Europe.

In Israel, he said, when young men and women turn 18, they are required to serve in the military for three years. Haim served from 1968 to 1971. "I got in right after the [1967] Six Day War," he recalled.

"It was a wonderful experience," he said, "in the discipline and the growing up. As 18-year-olds, we think we know every-



Haim Knister
Photo/Jon Clark

1977, opened his first salon, followed by two others. They did well until the economic recession of the 1980s, when he sold two of the salons and closed a third.

In 1989, with his wife at the time and their 1-year-old daughter, he moved to San Diego, worked for three years in a La Jolla salon, and, in 1992, opened his salon in Del Mar and began specializing in color.

"Prior to that, color was not a big service in our industry. We did

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thing and we [can] do better than everybody else. Going into a system that trains you and conditions you to face reality is a great place. And the military kind of has that. So I had a great experience there."

He served as a paratrooper.

Did he like jumping out of airplanes?

"I loved it," he said.

Later, in the U.S., he would join a sky-diving group for the fun of it.

After completing his military service, Haim, then in his early 20s, decided to pursue advanced training as an apprentice under Vidal Sassoon in London, England, and, later, with Sassoon, in New York.

In 1974, Haim moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma where he earned his hairdressing license, worked in a local salon, and, in

cutting and permanents. Coloring was something that women did at home. Very few salons, only higher salons, did that. So at the time, I felt there was an opportunity to create a color salon.

"There were some other places that did it low key, but I wanted to take it to another level. I wanted to be out there."

Today, other local salons have followed his lead, but most recently, Haim added another innovation to his line of products, Brazilian Keratin Treatment, which he describes as a natural hair straightening product that reduces curl, leaves hair soft, shiny and frizz-free for up to four months and cuts blow-drying time in half.

Asked why it is that he enjoys working with women so much, he replied: "I love it because there is never a dull moment. Women are definitely our consumers. They've changed our industry... Malls were built for women, not for men. We have a couple of shirts, we're happy with that. That's all we need.

"But women made me grow. Reinvent myself, constantly. Training myself for more. Because they're demanding more, more, and more. 'We want something new.'"

Now divorced and dating, he has a 21-year-old daughter currently in college in Tucson, Arizona, and admits he misses married life, "but it's not meant to be right now."

Quick Facts

Name: Haim Knister

Distinction: Master hairstylist Haim Knister, owner/operator of Haim Ltd. Salon in Del Mar, makes a habit of "giving back" to his industry and the community.

Resident of: Carmel Valley

Born: Tel Aviv, Israel, 60 years ago.

Education: High school and hairdressing trade school in Israel, followed by apprentice training with Vidal Sassoon in London and New York.

Marital status: Divorced and dating

Interests: Community service, beach walking, dancing and professional traveling as an educator for Eufora International.

Current reading: *Peaks and Valleys: Making Good and Bad Times Work For You — at Work and in Life*, by Spencer Johnson, M.D.

Favorite films: Musicals like "Singing in the Rain," "Fiddler on the Roof." And Woody Allen films and films starring Al Pacino and Robert De Niro.

Favorite Foods: Ethnic, including Mexican, French, Italian and Middle Eastern. "My mother's philosophy food-wise was: moderation. You can eat everything you want, in moderation."

Philosophy: "I think if you leave this world without giving back, it's a waste of my knowledge. Sharing your knowledge. Everyday, do something right. And live life happy. Dance through life and spread your wings."