



Cape Cod's only professional head -lice removal service opens in Brewster

Staff Photo by Barry Donahue

Maryellen Kumiega specializes in the removal of head lice and lice eggs. Well, someone has got to do it.

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You can pick your friends and you can pick your friend's head lice.

At least that's the business model Maryellen Kumiega of Brewster is utilizing as the only professional nitpicker on Cape Cod. Her business card reads "The Picky One," and she provides in-home, pesticide-free removal of head lice and eggs (the nits) for a problem that's more common than people would like to admit.

"I've been doing this for over a year," Kumiega said. "If you went off Cape you'd find (the service) to be more common. There's a woman in Boston who does it. A lot of people call because they live in areas that have this available and are here and find they have lice."

But those aren't lice they picked up in Brewster (we hope).

It is an unusual occupation, even part-time, but as a parent, Kumiega found she had a problem a couple of years ago, and there were few places to turn.

"I used several products. I even got a prescription from the pharmacy. And after this they still had lice eggs (the nits)," she recalled.

She wound up going off-Cape.

"I had no idea what I was looking for and I was too ashamed to ask anybody for help. I went to a nitpicker in Boston and saw the procedure. It was very delicate but I said 'I can do that.' Once you know what you're looking for it's easy," Kumiega explained.

The pesticides work on the adults and nymphs not the eggs. And over the years lice have developed resistance to some of the pesticides.|

"You have to take the time to pick out the eggs so I try to discourage people from using pesticides," Kumiega said. "It was important for me at the beginning to provide a service that's affordable to the Cape Cod community. My goal was to help families save time and money on lice removal through a pesticide free process."

The secret lice picking success is not in chemicals or shampoos but within ourselves.

"Patience, patience, patience, and good eyes," Kumiega explained.

What you're looking for are eggs, which a female louse thoughtfully attaches to a hair. Before she goes nit-picking Kumiega will give a client instruction over the phone on how to get rid of most of the adults. She'd prefer not to deal with a healthy population of bugs.

"I'm a big fan of olive oil (PAM) to smother the bugs," she explained. "Then I look for the eggs. Usually they're just one inch from the scalp on a hair. I go through section by section. I wear a magnifying glass. They're attached with a spot of glue to the hair. The only way to get them out is to manually pick them."

There are fine combs that can detect the nits but they'll still need to be plucked by hand.

"If you run your finger over them they feel like a grain of sand," Kumiega reported. "You pinch the hair and pull them off. It's time consuming. It usually takes two to three hours."

While she sometimes has adult patients mostly Kumiega deals with youngsters, aged 3 to 12.

"That's because they talk close together, it's easier for head-to-head contact," Kumiega said. "I go anywhere on the Cape, from Osterville and Centerville through Eastham."

Her customers are often worried and desperate.

"A lot of families tell me I'm very calming when I come in. I give advice on what housework they need to and also what they don't need to do."

Many people think they need to go crazy with cleaning, but that's not the case.

Kumiega works as a pre-school teacher in her other guise. She's comfortable with children. She'd like to make nit-picking a full time business, as she's down to two days a week teaching pre-school.

"I like the job," she reflected. "I try to come within 24 hours of a call. My children are getting older and I have more free time. I try to take care of it in one visit."

Occasionally people will call again, usually for handholding. Kumiega will explain the life of a louse to them.

"You need to be watchful for three weeks after I'm there. When the eggs are laid it takes seven to 10 days to hatch into a nymph and seven to 10 days to mature into an adult louse which lays eggs," she said. "They can lay five to seven eggs a day so do the math."

She advises combing the hair with a metal fine-toothed comb.

She's put up a few ads on the Internet, which people can find if they Google lice, nit-picker, Cape Cod.

She'll soon have her own web site, thepicky1.com and she can be emailed at thepickyone@comcast.net or reached by phone, 508-221-1054.

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