

As Seen In The BOSTON HERALD

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THE SMALL BUSINESS PAGE

Photography team snaps up fantasies

By NANCY KELLEHER

When Daphne Nichols began making photographic portraits in a home studio more than 20 years ago, Diane Dalpe was plugged into the corporate world, rising through the ranks at Gillette Co.

Now the two women are a team, the self-styled "love doctors of photography," whose aim is to enhance their clients' self-esteem while photographing them at their best.

Nichols' approach to photographing women evolved according to the wishes

of her clients. When she worked in her home, it was a trusting environment, and often a woman would ask her to take a somewhat more daring shot at the end of the session. Nichols began studying magazines to see how stylists worked to capture models at their most attractive.

"I learned a lot from *Cosmopolitan*," she said, including the lesson that some of the most alluring models are as plain as the next woman in street clothes without makeup.

She read an article in the *New Yorker* by a man

and poses.

Often the women come in saying the photographs will be a gift for husbands or boyfriends, then are pampered by hair, makeup and creative stylists in a way that changes their mood.

"Daphne makes them feel beautiful," said Dalpe. "By the time they leave us they feel good about themselves."

Dalpe joined Nichols as stylist for the photographs after a 20-year career in management at Gillette. "I always believed: If you're not doing what you love, it's time to make a change," Dalpe recalled. "I didn't love it anymore."

So when Gillette offered a buyout package to some employees as it battled a hostile takeover effort a decade ago, Dalpe opted out. She said her business expertise complements Nichols' creativity.

Fantasy Photography uses a wide variety of approaches to market its product. It advertises on the local network affiliates and in *Boston Magazine*, uses direct mail and attends home shows and trade shows.

"We have to be careful how we advertise so people

SMALL BUSINESS PROFILE

COMPANY NAME: Fantasy Photography by Daphne
HEADQUARTERS: Arlington
OWNED BY: Daphne Nichols and Diane Dalpe
PROJECTED SALES: \$200,000
EMPLOYEES: 2
PRINCIPAL BUSINESS: Creating romantic photographic images of women
THREE-YEAR GOAL: To take the business on the road to warmer climates four to five months each year
WHY DO BUSINESS IN MASSACHUSETTS: Women in this region are very conservative and need help expressing themselves

who complained that he was frustrated by looking at magazine images of women who don't exist, then going home to his ordinary-looking wife.

This struck a chord, and Nichols decided to give ordinary women a chance to appear extraordinary in her photographs.

While Fantasy Photography does mother-infant sessions and head shots for businesswomen, its mainstay is photographing women in romantic clothing

don't misunderstand it," said Dalpe. "People tend to equate boudoir with sleazy, when in reality we're trying to bring out inner beauty."

Nichols is writing a book and putting together a video with tips on how to prepare oneself and one's surroundings for photography at home.

Unlike many service operations, word-of-mouth from satisfied customers was not a source of business for Fantasy Photography 10 years ago, be-



GET THE PICTURE? Diane Dalpe and Daphne Nichols of Fantasy Photography. Fantasy's mainstay is photographing women in romantic clothing and poses. Staff photo by Ren Norton

cause women were reluctant to show their alluring photographs to anyone but their husbands or boyfriends. But that has changed over the last decade, and women are proud to share the images with friends, said Dalpe.

A turning point for the business came when it was featured on television's "Evening Magazine" about 10 years ago. Two other shows followed, and they generated a lot of interest from women who had not known this sort of photographic experience was available.

said Dalpe.

Another boost came when Greg Godek listed Fantasy Photography in his book "1001 Ways to Be Romantic." People have called from all over the country, based on that exposure, which has Nichols and Dalpe mulling over the idea of setting up franchises — if they can find the right people. They also would like to follow the sun, taking their operation on the road in winter to locales where they can do more outdoor photography.