

OCTOBER 2011 FREE

Belle

NOW TRENDING

*Fall Fashion's
Seven Wonders*

COFFEE OR BEER?

Tasting Notes

ARTISANS UNITE

For Retail Therapy

**OCTOBER
CHECKLIST**

*Where to Be,
What to Do
In Richmond
This Month*

**POLE
DANCING**

For Fitness



Permanent Marker

Amy Black offers nipple repigmentation, shown right, for women recovering from breast cancer surgery.

PHOTO BY SCOTT ELMQUIST

Amy Black of Trademark Tattoo has been a tattoo artist in Richmond for more than a decade and was voted 2011 best tattoo artist by *Style Weekly* readers. But no amount of experience or acclaim could prepare her for the impact of her recent work with breast cancer survivors. Black performs a procedure known as nipple repigmentation for post-mastectomy patients out of her Carytown studio and in conjunction with the Richmond Plastic Surgeons group.

"One of the first ladies that I worked with," Black recalls -- "I literally felt like I just saw these waves of huge stress just sort of melt right off of her. To be able to stand up and look in a mirror and look down on herself and she didn't have to see that one discolored nipple anymore. Everything was right again. And she was really happy."

Black says there's a lack of awareness in the breast cancer community that certain skilled tattoo artists can perform the work. Initially available only in plastic surgeon's offices, the form of medical tattooing has moved more into the domain of tattoo artists who treat the

process with the complexity and subtlety it requires. "A lot of these women think that all you get is what the plastic surgeon tells you," she says. "Sometimes all they get is two kinds of different colored, flat pink circles -- no shading, no detailing. But that's not the plastic surgeon's job. The plastic surgeon has plenty on their hands."

Black sees her work as the punctuation mark at the end of a long ordeal of cancer treatment. "For them it's their final passage," she says. "The final mile marker after what is usually at least a two-year journey from the moment they're diagnosed to radiation and chemo to a mastectomy to the implants."

Black works to give breast cancer survivors as natural a look as possible. It's less about the medical side of treatment as it is the holistic aspect of becoming whole again. "It's bigger than me. I knew that going into it," Black says. "This isn't about me trying to get exposure for myself. It's about trying to get these ladies the best possible recovery. It's small, but it's really beautiful."

Trademark Tattoo is located at 3125 W. Cary St. To find out more visit trademarktattoo.blogspot.com.



COURTESY OF AMY BLACK

Dance for Survival

For most people, dancing in front of 600 strangers would be an exercise in terror. But for the Celebration of Life dancers, who will perform at the annual Pink Tie Gala on Oct. 22, it's anything but. Event organizer Susan Groves, founder of River City Charities, says it's an opportunity to celebrate: "They've overcome cancer. A crowd of 600 people is not a big deal to them."

Each year Groves selects the team of breast cancer survivors at varying stages of their treatment or recovery. Each team member picks a dance and is paired with a partner, either a professional dance instructor or member of the community. Twelve weeks of dance rehearsals follow; Rigby's Jig Dance Studio donates the time and space. Groves posts video and pictures of the progress online so that fans can follow.

"People will pick their one for whatever reason," she explains -- "whether they went to school at the same place or are the same age -- and they'll follow them the whole way. People really become attached to them." It's this attachment that makes the final dance an emotional and triumphant experience.

The Pink Tie Gala is presented by Bon Secours Cancer Institute. Proceeds benefit the Central Virginia affiliate of the Susan G. Komen Foundation. pinktiegala.org.

Celebration of Life dancers, front row: Chelsey Kidd, Novi Melchert, Debbie Chadick, Susan Nienaber. Back row: Bethann Canada, Julie Hignett, Eileen Hastings, Laura Gayle



COURTESY OF PINK TIE GALA



DINNER WITH FRIENDS

Celebrity waiters, including politicians and newsmakers, will serve guests at the Virginia Breast Cancer Foundation's 15th annual Breast Cancer Awareness dinner Oct. 24 at the Brickhouse Run restaurant in Petersburg. A special menu for the night is \$35 per person. All tips will go directly to the foundation, whose goal, according to the event's chairwoman, Kathy Funk, is to "educate, advocate, and eradicate breast cancer in the near future." For reservations call 862-1815. For information about the event or the Virginia Breast Cancer Foundation, visit vbcf.org.