



Immokalee fourth-grader gets pampered for improving grades

By TRACY X. MIGUEL

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Nine-year-old Nancy Garcia has never been to a salon.

Nor had the Immokalee fourth-grader ever been treated to a day spa experience.

Two months ago, her counselor at Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA) charter school in Immokalee motivated Nancy to improve her schoolwork with the idea of a "Girls' Day."

Nancy's schoolwork had slipped behind after the death of her grandparents and because she was battling asthma.

But with the incentive, Nancy, who wants to be a scientist when she grows up, turned things around to get the reward.

She drastically improved her grades, homework and class participation and plans to keep up the improved level of work.

"This is a student who has worked really, really hard," JoAnn Blumenthal said.

She also hoped to boost Nancy's self-esteem.

Nancy was treated to a "Girls' Day" on Saturday at Tiger's Den Salon, an Aveda concept salon on Bonita Beach Road in Bonita Beach.

The afternoon at the salon started with a mini-facial.

"I feel like an angel," Nancy said afterward because her face was so smooth.

Next came the hair styling.

Her parents didn't allow her hair, which hangs below her waist, to be cut, but Nancy had something else in mind for the mini-makeover.

She wanted to get her black hair curled.

Nancy sipped her lemonade, glancing at O.D. Thackthay as he styled her hair.

She smiled as the first curl bounced.

Thackthay made a quick call for dinner reservations at a restaurant.

"Holy cow... that's movie star hair," said Thackthay, who admits that Nancy's hair was the longest he has ever styled.

When she looked in the mirror, Nancy couldn't believe her transformation.

Suddenly her face brightened and she glowed with a happiness that wasn't evident just minutes before.

"I look so beautiful," she said in a shy, soft voice.

Then came Nancy's first manicure.

She selected a coral pink nail polish color.

"This is special for me, too, because we like to help people feel good, even little people," Cecile Saggese, hair salon co-owner, told Nancy as she applied the nail polish.

Nancy said she felt like she was in a cloud.

Nancy chatted about the two rings she wore on each middle finger. She received the rings meaning "for life together" and "love together" for her first communion and will wear them in a necklace when they no longer fit.

Then lip gloss was dabbed on her lips.

In less than two hours, Nancy was transformed.

And while Nancy was getting all dazzled, Blumenthal, who is a regular customer at Tiger's Den Salon, was getting her hair colored and cut.

Tiger's Den Salon surprised Nancy with an Easter basket full of goodies, including shampoo, conditioner, facial moisturizers and a stuffed animal.

Everyone at the salon awed the girl's beauty.

"You're making all of our day special, because we'll remember that," Saggese said.

Saggese told Blumenthal that the salon would donate its services again and would like to do it once a year for a student who excels.

"Our kids in Immokalee need stuff like this," Blumenthal said.

It was the first time Blumenthal, who has been a counselor at RCMA for four years and owner of Biofeedback Center of Florida in Naples, motivated a student with a special reward and wants to continue motivating kids with "outside the box" rewards.

But the day wasn't over at the salon.

Blumenthal took Nancy to Target to buy clothes and dinner at Bella Vita Ristorante in Bonita Springs.

"It's the most super day I've ever had," Nancy said. "Today was the best day of my life."

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