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Male clients relax at the Exclusively Male salon in Kenwood on Wednesday. All-male salons are popping up around the country, but Exclusively Male has been open in Cincinnati for years.

Closing gender gap, men go for pampering

By Randy Tucker
The Cincinnati Enquirer

There was a time when a close shave followed by a brisk splash of Old Spice was the extent of most men's personal grooming regimen.

Not anymore.

Day spas, beauty salons and personal care products are growing in popularity among men in the Tri-state and across the country, with fewer of them seeing such products and services as exclusively for women.

Even hardcore rapper Eminem has been known to turn to the traditionally female enclave of the beauty salon for treatment. *Us Weekly* reported last year that he was spotted getting a facial at Ole Henriksen Face/Body salon in Los Angeles.

Locally, salon owners such as Marie Stokes - whose Kenwood salon Exclusively Male has been serving an all-male clientele for 14 years - are taking advantage of the closing gender gap by providing such services as massages, facials

and nail care - without the polish, of course - just for men.

"When I first came here, guys were reluctant to get manicures and facials," said Stokes, 34, who bought the business six months ago after working at the salon for more than nine years. "They wanted to go in the back room so no one would see them. But over the years, they've become very comfortable with it."

Stokes said the majority of her customers are business

Growing market

■ The market for men's personal-care products is estimated to be growing 11 percent faster than the women's market annually, according to *Beauty Biz Week*, an industry publication.

■ Men-only beauty salons, such as Exclusively Male in Kenwood, are springing up nationally. The Reading, Pa.-based American Male Salon was launched nationwide in 1999.

■ Businesses that traditionally saw more women than men are seeing an increase in customers as more men grow comfortable with going to a salon. Bill Huffman, who manages Hawaiian Tanning in North College Hill, said the percentage of men who use his tanning beds has doubled in the past 10 years.

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executives and other professionals.

"We serve a lot of professional men for whom it's important for their hair and nails to look nice," she said. "But we're also seeing a lot of young men coming out of college who are seeing that they need to be presentable."

Daniel Butler, vice president of retail operations for the National Retail Federation - the nation's largest retail trade group - said the personal care market is still driven largely by the female consumer dollar. But male spending in traditional female consumer categories has seen explosive growth, he said.

The market for men's personal-care products, for example, is estimated to be growing 11 percent faster than the women's market annually, according to Beauty Biz Week, an industry publication.

"There's definitely been an in-

crease in men going after these types of products and services," Butler said. "Male consumers have become more educated about the benefits of those things, and they realize they're not just for women."

David Phillips, a retired Procter & Gamble executive and a regular at Exclusively Male, began visiting the salon about 10 years ago after his wife gave him a spa package there for Christmas.

"I wasn't the kind of guy who did manicures; I went to the barbershop," the Amberley Village resident said. "But I found I liked the massages, the manicures and the ambience at Exclusively Male, and I've been going ever since."

Phillips said it's simply narrow-minded to think that both sexes can't benefit from salon treatments.

"We can all benefit from stress reduction and being the best we can be," Phillips said. "If you indulge only the women in your life,

but you don't indulge yourself, what's the point?"

That attitude has led more and more personal care businesses to step up to meet the growing demand from men.

Exclusively Male is not the only salon in Cincinnati that serves men. And not all salons serving men are small, men-only salons.

Even businesses that cater to both women and men are seeing an increase in business as their services become more acceptable among men.

Bill Huffman, who manages Hawaiian Tanning in North College Hill, said he's seen the percentage of men that use his tanning beds double since the early 1990s.

Now, almost one-fourth of his customers are men.

"When we started out, we had four beds," Huffman said. "Now I have seven, and men have definitely contributed to our growth."

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