

## At Work With | Nickie Janes, owner of Smooth waxing boutique in Norfolk

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*As told to Pilot writer Carolyn Shapiro*

I've been an aesthetician for about 10 years. I had been working as a makeup artist before, and I just wanted to help people more with their skin. I went to school, and I did not know that waxing was going to be part of it. I was like, "I'm not doing that." But it actually worked out well.

My very first job, I had to start waxing clients, and I got really nervous and really scared. That helped me. I did all my research, and I was as gentle as possible. I actually have the very first waxing client I ever did. She was in here today, after 10 years.

When you graduate, you find all your best friends, your sisters, your relatives and you say, "Come on, let's do this!" And you give them a shot of tequila, and you say, "This is a really good plan." It's always good to go to somebody who's a little more experienced.

Part of the trick is always remembering what it feels like to be the person that's on the table. Having empathy for the client and understanding that, first of all, that person's half-naked. They're feeling very vulnerable, and you're about to do something painful.

Anybody can learn how to apply the wax and how to remove it, but there are certain techniques. We use much smaller strips (for removing hair). But overall, you just really have to be able to connect with the person and keep them calm. When I opened here, I didn't want it to look like a sterile doctor's office because that makes people more nervous. And the more nervous they are, the more they're going to feel the pressure. So we wanted to make it a little more spa-like, a little more comforting, have the candles and the soft music. And we want it to smell good. So it's all that sensory experience that I think really takes down the anxiety a couple of notches.

When I first started doing this, people would ask me, "Are your clients porn stars?" Do you know any porn stars that live in Norfolk, Virginia? I don't think this is a hotbed for porn. That's another thing that's changed. I've got clients who are attorneys, physicians, teachers, you name it. People are more comfortable talking about it. It's not as taboo as it was.

When our day starts, it's just mayhem. We start taking clients at 8 o'clock in the morning. I do Brazilians (bikini waxing) every 20 minutes. Ninety percent of what I do is Brazilians. We will see – it could be – 20 clients a day or more. Last November

when I checked, we had done over 10,000 Brazilians in the three years that we had been open.

We do three different types of bikini waxes. And we do full body waxes. So we do everything from brows down to your toes, if you wanted to. A basic bikini wax is just the outside of a conservative bathing suit, anything that would be sort of peeking out the sides. A deep-line bikini is maybe 2 inches in from that bikini line and a little bit off the top. A Brazilian is one of two things. It's either everything from front to back, every nook and cranny, just like the day you were born. Or, some people leave like a little bit of strip just up in the front. Everybody decorates differently.

When I first started doing it, people wanted to leave more hair. Now, it's definitely the trend to take everything off. Some people say it just makes them feel cleaner. But there's definitely a relation to the age of the client. Not always, but in general. Younger people want it all off. Women, I'd say 40 and up, want to leave a little something there. And my oldest clients, women who are maybe in their 60s, they prefer to leave more hair.

I tell people who are kind of nervous, "Honey, it's like looking at an elbow. It really does nothing for me." I kind of explain to them I've seen it all. Nothing's going to scare me. I'm like a robot. I see the hair. That's all I see.

People get distracted when you small-talk with them. You really get to know clients. I've seen clients go through divorce, cancer treatments, good things: marriages, children. It's kind of like being a therapist. It's like Vegas in here. What happens in here stays in here.

We do see men. It's a much smaller percentage, but we tend to see a lot more back waxes with men. Men don't handle the pain quite as well as women do. I'll tell you that. Women, we're used to having babies, wearing heels, getting cramps. Men come in and you do a little eyebrow wax between here (she points to the space above her nose), and they're like, "Ahh!" The tougher they are, the big tough ones, Navy SEALs, those are the ones who are going to be screaming with an eyebrow wax.

The most memorable one, probably, was about six months into doing this. I had a client who was a woman who had previously been a man. I was really nervous. I was embarrassed. I didn't know how to work with everything. It was very unique. She was really awesome. She was up-front. She looked at me and was like, "Honey, you and I both know I wasn't born with this. I went to Mexico to get it." She just laid it out for me.

I tell people, "You're going to feel so much tougher when you leave here." In a way, it's just sort of empowering. It makes women feel like, "This is something I never thought I could do, and I did it. Now, what else can I take on?"