

Monterey County's Health Magazine | MARCH 2017

# HEALTH MATTERS

## Beauty & Dental ISSUE

INSIDE:

Taking Off the Tattoo

Hand Rejuvenation

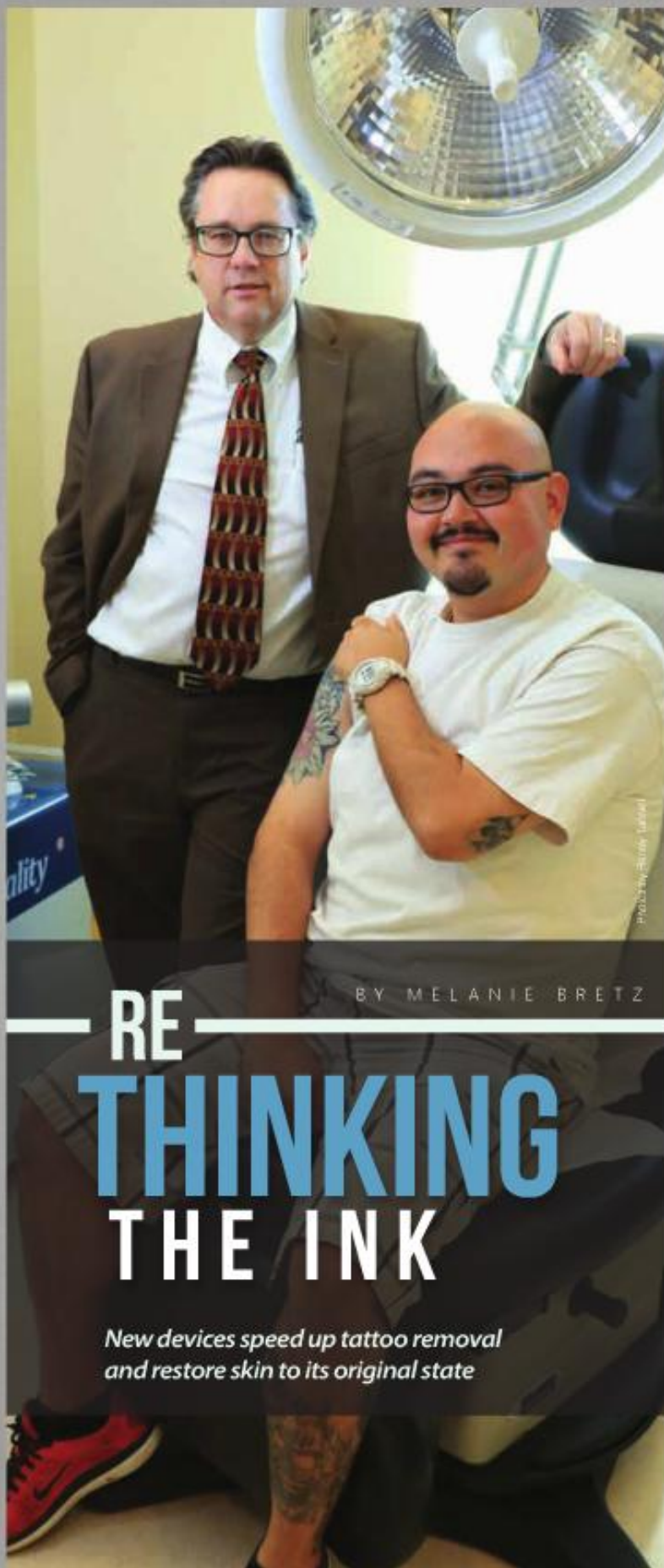
Plastic Surgery for Gums

Nutrition for Whiter Teeth

& Much More...



MONTEREY  
HERALD



PHOTOGRAPHY: JARVIS

BY MELANIE BRETZ

# RE THINKING THE INK

*New devices speed up tattoo removal  
and restore skin to its original state*

**M**OST OF US MAKE a decision or two in life that we end up regretting ... an ultra-trendy haircut, that expensive outfit you never wore, a relationship you stayed in against your better judgement.

And sometimes that regrettable decision is a little bit harder to put behind you.

Many people with tattoos find that later in life, this permanent ornamentation isn't as cool as it was when they were younger, and the tattoos may even become impediments to their life goals.

A Harris Interactive Poll in 2014 found that roughly one of every five American adults has at least one tattoo. But according to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, tattoo removals have also risen significantly in the past few years.

Most of the people seeking tattoo removal who see Dr. Matt Romans and Dr. Jeremy Silk, plastic surgeons in Salinas, are between 20 and 50 years old and have a skin decoration they want to alter or remove for any number of reasons.

"It may represent a former affiliation like with a gang, lost the sentimental value it once had, or be in a visible area of the body that could get in the way of securing a job or military service," says Dr. Romans, who is a partner with Dr. Silk in Salinas Valley Plastic Surgery Associates and REVITALessense Medical Spa & Laser. "And some people simply change their mind as their tastes evolve."

"When I turned 18, I had my mother's name tattooed above my heart, and it's still my favorite," says Salinas native Alex Fregoso. Over the years, the 32-year-old added several more, including one on the back of his arm that he no longer wanted.

When he met Dr. Romans, who was looking for people to experience the practice's new Astanza laser — an advanced device specifically designed for tattoo removal — Fregoso decided to take him up on his offer.

"After four treatments, it is already starting to fade," says Fregoso. "People think that tattoo removal is too painful, but I say if you can take the pain of getting it, you can take the far lesser pain of getting it removed."

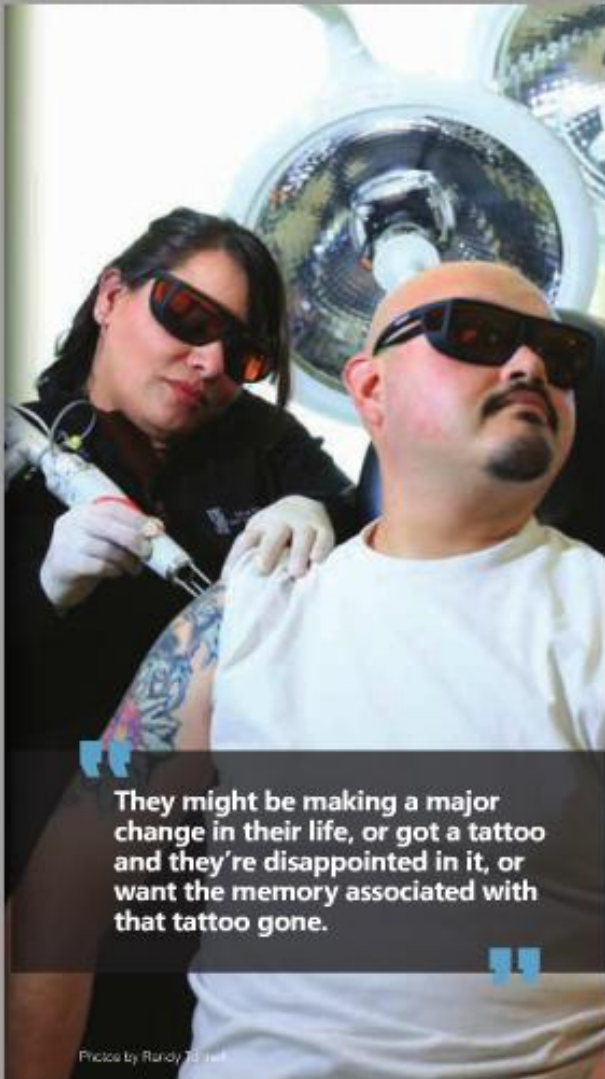
Dr. Romans offers use of an innovative gel pad that enables more rapid removal. "Without the gel pad, we can only hit the ink once during a treatment," he says. "With the gel pad we can treat the same area three times during a single procedure. Patients say it also lessens the pain."

The intense light of the laser breaks the ink into particles that are removed through the body's lymphatic system, causing the tattoo to fade. Some tattoos take more treatments to remove than others — experts agree that homemade tattoos can often be harder to remove, since the ink is denser and applied at inconsistent depths.

Another local practice that offers tattoo removal is Face First Clinic in Monterey, owned by registered nurse Joanne Shiffman with her husband, Dr. Roger Shiffman, where a laser with four wavelengths is used to treat all colors of ink.

"People come in for different reasons," says Joanne Shiffman. "They might be making a major change in their life, or got a tattoo and they're disappointed in it, or want the memory associated with that tattoo gone."

"The lasers we use remove even the darkest tattoos and restore the skin back to its original state," she says. "The



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Photos by Randy J. Cook



BEFORE



AFTER

number of treatments required depends on the type of inks, colors and density as well as the size of the area involved."

The Q-Switch laser delivers the heat quickly preserving surrounding tissue, she notes: "We apply topical numbing cream and use a great cooling technology that helps the patient feel as comfortable as possible. Sometimes blisters form but they typically heal quickly."

One Monterey resident who sought help from the Shiffmans is Jamie Goncalves, a friend of Shiffman's daughter, who grew increasingly uncomfortable with the large, vintage-nautical-themed tattoo she got on her upper chest at age 23.

"I have other tattoos, but this one didn't come out well and was higher up on my chest than expected," Goncalves says. "I had just started dating the man who's now my husband and he invited me to an event at a lake. I didn't go because I didn't want his family to see it."

Since she started the removal process in 2012, she's had about 15 treatments and the tattoo is now barely visible.

"A big reason I had the tattoo removed was because I wanted to be able to wear my dream wedding dress without that tattoo showing," says Goncalves, who was married in October 2015.

"Our experience with Jamie drove home how important tattoo removal can be when people are making changes in their life, regardless of the reason," says Shiffman. "It inspired us to open a free tattoo removal clinic for participants in Rancho Cielo programs. We do this because we can and want to give back to the community. It's satisfying to help these young people get a fresh start."

While attending an event at Rancho Cielo in Salinas, the Shiffmans saw a way to use their professional skills to help disadvantaged young people. Established in 2000, nonprofit Rancho Cielo is a comprehensive learning and social services center with five programs for underserved and disconnected youth in Monterey County.

For three years now, Face First has offered free tattoo removal services for individuals in the program, and participants can come as often as they need to have a tattoo lightened or removed.

"These young people are changing their lives and part of that means getting rid of tattoos that represent a part of their past and are holding them back," Shiffman says. ■

*Melanie Bretz lives in Monterey and has written on a wide range of topics, including health care, during more than three decades as a writer.*