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Business

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After 30 years, Hair Club of New England is growing

By Angela Carter
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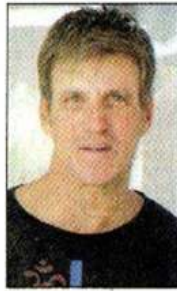
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NEW HAVEN — It was 1976, Steven Barth's senior year in college.

But a milestone that normally would have launched him into the professional working world and a new phase of his life was overshadowed by a blow to his confidence and self-esteem: Barth was losing his hair.

"That was a very, very powerful and traumatic experience for me," he said. "My father and my father's three brothers had lost their hair. The punch was pretty well spiked."

Back in the 1970s, a shaved head was not yet vogue for men. Barth couldn't afford surgery and felt toupees looked too unnatural.



Barth

But the end to his frustrations and the beginning of a decades-long business venture would come when he spotted an advertisement in the New York Post.

Barth met with Sy Sperling — founder of the Hair Club for Men — for a consultation in a Madison Avenue office. He borrowed \$800 from

his brother for a treatment and has been connected to the company ever since.

"I own the most individual licenses for Hair Club than any individual," said Barth, the franchisee for Hair Club of New England, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year across locations at 1 Long

Wharf Drive here in the city and further north in Farmington and Massachusetts.

Barth also opened locations in Dallas, Atlanta, Chicago and Milwaukee. "It became a natural career path. It became a great passion for me," he said.

Sperling is no longer involved, but earlier in the company's history when it was known as Hair Club for Men, Sperling's infomercial gained household familiarity with the memorable phrase: "I'm not only the Hair Club president, I'm also a client."

Hair Club's signature product, the Bio-Matrix Strand by Strand, is a way to non-surgically integrate an individually-designed matrix of human hair into clients' balding or thinning areas.

Barth said the company adapted to

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consumers' needs by introducing treatments for women and adding more options, such as transplants and hair loss prevention therapy. He created the brand's community arm, Hair Club for Kids, which provides hair for free to children who are losing hair due to disease.

Randy Paris, Hair Club's director of sales, said he has been a client for 24 years and an employee for 20. "At 18, I started losing my hair," he said.

He decided to shave off all of his hair, but the barber advised him against it and recommended he visit Hair Club. "I can't even tell you the value it gave me in terms of confidence," Paris said.

In looking forward, Barth said the company continues research and development for improving the seamless appearance of the Bio-Matrix solution and hair and scalp treatments and plans to expand surgical options.

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Randy Paris is director of sales for Hair Club of New England. The franchise has a New Haven location and is celebrating its 30-year anniversary.

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