

A labor of Love

How Tina Lovelace built her successful Woodhouse Day Spas

A Product of



FACES OF WHIPPLEWOOD



AND A DREAM

For 10 years, Tina Lovelace jotted her ideas for the spa she dreamed of opening in a small, spiral notebook:

- Should be in an old Victorian house.*
- Should have a New Orleans ambience.*
- Should be an experience — from the slippers to the beverage to the robe.*

One day, her husband, Jeff Sporkin, said: “Just do it. There’s never going to be a better time than the present. But you’re either going to have to quit your job and work at a spa to learn the ropes — or buy a franchise.”

years later, The Woodhouse Day Spa she opened in an 1896 Victorian house in Denver is the top spa of the franchise nationally, and the second location she launched in Littleton in 2015 has doubled its revenue in its second year.

Lovelace bought a franchise.

The rest, as the saying goes, is history: Thirteen

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In the photo above, owner Tina Lovelace, right, stands with Tori Tong, the concierge at The Denver Woodhouse Day Spa check-in desk, adjacent to the retail area.

Stories by Ann Macari Healey — Photos by Paul DiSalvo

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“I had a vision and a dream of opening up my own spa,” Lovelace says. “I love entertaining and opening up my home to others, and now I get to do that here in my businesses every day of the week. They both were a labor of love.”

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Tina Lovelace is 51, petite and graceful, reflective of the elegant, serene and soothing style of her distinctive spas. But she’s also, in her own words, wired, self-driven, self-motivated, a spirited Type A personality whose persistence, passion, love for people and relentless work ethic are foundations to her success.

She not only runs two award-winning spas, she also owns the properties on which they’re located — the historic Victorian home at 941 E. 17th Ave. in Denver and the stone-and-stucco building at 8351 Southpark Lane in Littleton. And she’s the regional developer for The Woodhouse franchise, responsible for expanding the brand in Colorado, Utah and Idaho. The latter two states don’t yet boast a Woodhouse spa, but Colorado’s seventh will be opening soon in northern Colorado.

“This,” she says, with a smile, of her business realm, “is probably going to be it.”

To understand how Lovelace got to where she is today, you have to go back to Texas, to the small town of Sherman, just north of Dallas, where she grew up with two older sisters and her late parents, Dennis and Ann Lovelace.

They didn’t have much money, Lovelace says. “I grew up pretty poor.”

Her mom stayed home with the girls; her dad had a number of jobs — selling vacuum cleaners, running a bread route. But “my dad never knew a stranger — he was very personable — and he worked really hard,” Lovelace says.



The retail room at The Littleton Woodhouse Day Spa, where Lovelace and concierge Sophia Luna greet guests as they walk through the door, includes clothes, jewelry, spa products and other accessories.

His break came when he took a job as a janitor with then-Texas Instruments, now Raytheon, a major U.S. defense contractor and industrial corporation. He watched the job postings, made friends and when a position in the machine shop opened, he was hired for it.

“I’m very much like my father,” Lovelace says. “I shouldn’t have the life I have today, but I worked really hard to get here . . . He was such a hard worker that he eventually became the supervisor of the department.”

Lovelace never attended college, but her jobs, fueled by a tremendous work ethic, became her classrooms. After high school, she worked three jobs to support herself. She then worked her way up through a grocery store chain where she started as a checkout cashier.

At 27, she joined the insurance company Unum as an assistant for its top two sales reps. She cranked out the data and information needed to put together proposals and focused on learning as much as she could by taking lateral moves to understand how different departments worked. After 13 years, United Health Care hired her as account manager in its New Orleans office.

“It was my big break,” Lovelace remembers. “They hired me because of my personality and persistence. I wouldn’t take no for an answer. I called every year — ‘Are you hiring?’” Finally, she heard “yes.”

Promoted to management, she moved back to Texas to run a 30-person client services department for the company’s southwest region. When her husband, an insurance consultant, was transferred to Denver, she applied for a job at Cigna Health Care that had already been offered to another person. But she doggedly pursued an interview, after which, she says, the previous offer was rescinded and she was given the job. She became the number two sales rep in the country for the company, winning the Rookie of the Year award.

“Once I proved my worth, my value, I didn’t need that degree any longer,” Lovelace says of her journey through the insurance industry. “No one ever knew I didn’t have that degree.”

Throughout many of those years, Lovelace had been writing down spa ideas in her notebook.

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The Denver Woodhouse Day Spa – a historic home with comfort

Tina Lovelace calls the Denver Woodhouse Day Spa “our first baby.”

Opened in December 2004 in the former Merritt bed-and-breakfast — a 7,500-square-foot 1896 Victorian home at 941 E. 17th Ave. — it is the top-performing spa nationally of the franchise, a place it has held for 10 of the 13 years it has been open.

The location is special: The home, in Denver’s Swallow Hill National Historic District, belonged to the late state Sen. Elmer Merritt. It, and others in the neighborhood, were designed by noted architect Frank Edbrooke, who lived next door and designed such landmarks as the Brown Palace and the Oxford Hotel.

In foreclosure when Lovelace bought it, the house was fully furnished — with sleigh beds, poster beds and beautiful armoires. The beds went to charity; Lovelace kept the armoires and reupholstered some of the other furnishings.

“When I walked in the door, I immediately knew it was my spa,” she says. “It embraced the concept perfectly.”

Burnished wood floors, richly colored rugs, period chandeliers and stained glass windows add to the house-turned-spa’s homey yet elegant comfort.

The spa has won myriad awards over the years, including 5280’s Top of the Town in 2016, the Denver A-List in 2017 and Parent magazine’s Family Favorites in 2017.

A Holiday Open House on Dec. 13 will help celebrate the spa’s 13 years of success.

“Every year, we shut the spa down early and the team celebrates the holidays together and decorates the spas,” Lovelace says. “We are very much like family.”



The Denver Woodhouse Day Spa is in a historic former bed-and-breakfast at 941 E. 17th Ave. “When I walked in the door, I immediately knew it was my spa,” owner Tina Lovelace says.



A comfortable sitting area welcomes guests to the spa.



The Vichy Room boasts a state-of-the-art body treatment.

The Littleton Woodhouse Day Spa – ‘a little bit of chic and shabby’

First, it was County Line Barbecue, a popular local restaurant. Then, it was Crystal Rose, an events center in which dandelions were poking through the floor when Tina Lovelace saw its potential and bought the building in June 2015.

She gutted the inside of the building, remapped the entrance and opened to the public in December 2015. Today, the Woodhouse Day Spa, at 8351 Southpark Lane, boasts gas lanterns from New Orleans and four red rocking chairs on the porch to welcome customers into a contemporary, sophisticated, state-of-the-art interior.

“We like a little bit of chic and shabby,” Lovelace says, “so we have a little bit of the modern, clean finishes but we also throw in some things that are kind of old.”

Like embossed wallpaper and sparkling chandeliers and bronze sconces.

And the classic Deco bar that lines the back wall of the lobby and retail area that came from the former Tender Trap Saloon, a gangster-controlled establishment in Chicago.

But the relaxation room, with floor-to-ceiling windows that gaze out onto mountain views, is Lovelace’s favorite spot.

There’s a fireplace and comfortable sit-

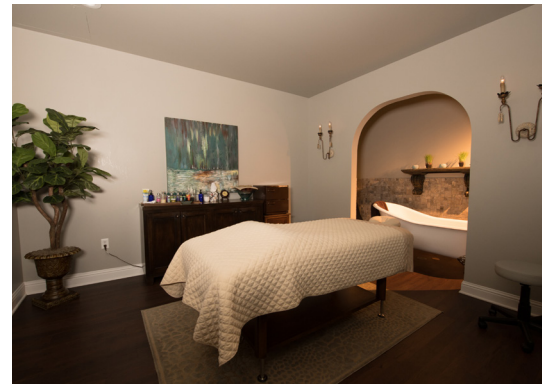


Concierge Sophia Luna and Tina Lovelace enjoy the beautiful relaxation room.

ting areas and a café for catered lunches and events such as bridal parties. The patio and grassy area just outside have chaise lounges, and Lovelace is thinking about adding yoga and cabana massages in the future.

“The visions we have . . .,” she says, trailing off as she takes in the view. “It’s really nice and peaceful out here.”

So far, the existing vision is working: The spa, whose Holiday Open House will be Dec. 14, has doubled its revenue in its second year of operation.



The tub bath is a soothing capstone to a signature treatment.



The spa, in a former restaurant and events center, is at 8351 Southpark Lane.



A focal point in the retail area is a classic Deco bar originally from a Chicago establishment that was controlled by gangsters.

'It's about the person who walks through that door'

Visiting a Woodhouse Day Spa is not just about being pampered.

It's also, Tina Lovelace emphasizes, about results: "We want you to feel good — and look good."

The spa's signature lines and treatments help accomplish that.

The core line of Skincenticals, a med-results oriented skin care line, is the franchise's top-selling product in the state. Seaweed — from the Ireland-based Voya line — forms the basis of the spa's signature treatments, from pedicures to body wraps to facials.

"The seaweed is hand-harvested and when you rehydrate the seaweed strands, which are in all our signature treatments, the seaweed comes back to life," Lovelace explains. "It provides nutrients to the body. You can take your seaweed home and use it a

couple more times. Once you've used it, you can grind it up, put it in your pet's food, or you can put it in your garden and give back to nature."

Massage choices also offer Himalayan salt stones for a stone treatment.

In one of the rooms, Lovelace picks up a smooth stone from a pile in a bowl, glowing pink from the light beneath. "We try to use things that nature inspires for the body," she says. "You can use these as deodorant; you can use them as an exfoliant. We even have them where they're ground up and you can have them in a water bottle."

Among the spas' many services are several signature treatments: the Woodhouse Hydrafacial, a non-invasive treatment that integrates fusion technology; the Woodhouse Escape, which incorporates a taste of seven

specialized treatments; and the Four-Handed Massage, where two therapists are massaging at the same time.

"When you walk through that door, we have no idea what's going on in your mind, in your life, what could have just happened to you, what could be stressing you out or if you're celebrating something," Lovelace says.

That's why it's important, she tells her staff, to "always remember it's not about us. It's about the person who walks through that door. The most valuable thing someone can give you is their time. And this is why we do what we do."

For specific information on services, visit The Denver Woodhouse Day Spa, denver.woodhousespas.com, and The Littleton Woodhouse Day Spa, littleton.woodhousespas.com.

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"I love people," she says. "I also love to go to the spa. And I would go to a spa and look around. Instead of looking at the negatives, I always took away the positives and said, 'If I were going to have my own place, I would do this. If I were going to have my own place, I would do that.'"

So one Sunday afternoon, even though she loved her insurance job, she scoured the internet in hopes of chasing her dream. She stumbled on a new franchise called The Woodhouse. She liked what she read and flew to Victoria, Texas, to meet the owners "and fell in love with them."

Back in Denver, Lovelace and her husband began looking for properties. None felt right.

"And I remember driving down 17th Avenue one day, and I looked over my shoulder and said, 'If only we could have that house.' And he was 'Well, let's check it out.' And I said, 'There's no way we could ever afford that, there's no way.'"

The home turned out to be the old Merritt bed and breakfast, built in 1896. It was in foreclosure.

"When I walked in the door," Lovelace recalls, "I immediately knew it was my spa. It felt warm and welcoming. And it must feel that way to everyone else because we have had probably 130,000 to 140,000 people come through that

spa. And she continues to shock and surprise me."

(That's how she refers to her spas — a living, breathing 'she.')

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Although the two locations are unique in their décor and ambience, they share the same sophisticated, state-of-the-art amenities and offerings.

The spas pride themselves on their core Skincentical line and seaweed-based signature treatments that promote med-spa results.

"We're about pampering, we're about experience," Lovelace says. "But we're

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also about results. We make sure it's not all fluff. We want you to feel good — and look good — and be happy with the results when you walk out that door.”

Each spa has state-of-the-art pedicure and manicure rooms, fully equipped locker rooms for women and men, duet rooms for doubles massages, single-treatment rooms for massages and facials, tub rooms and a specialized body treatment room for the signature detoxifying seaweed wrap.

Besides having a selection of teas, each spa also has a full tavern license. Customers have their choice of Colorado beers, Stranahan's Colorado whiskey, Oban scotch, a selection of wines, Prosecco and mimosas.

“The thing that makes Woodhouse different from other spas, and why we've been so successful, is because we really try and focus on the total experience,” Lovelace says. “So it's not just a great massage. It's the ambience. It's the beverage. It's how you're greeted. And it's about every element that touches our guest.”

Between the two locations, Lovelace manages a staff of more than 100 people to serve the about 150,000 customers, generally ranging in age from 30 to 65, who walk through her Woodhouse doors each year. About 15 to 20 percent of those customers are men, an untapped market in Lovelace's view. She hopes to attract more men to her Littleton location with its larger and more appealing locker room and less-Victorian environment. With that in mind, the Littleton spa has hosted various men's events, such as cigar and whiskey nights.

Giving back to community also is a key component to the business: Lovelace hosts various charity and nonprofit events and parties, such as kickoffs for Cancer League, at the spas. She and her



From left, owner Tina Lovelace, lead massage therapist Alex Laub, concierge Tori Tong and concierge Shanice Bergstrand smile from the staircase to the second floor at The Denver Woodhouse Day Spa.

staff volunteer their time and services, like providing makeup, hair and dress support at the ARC fashion show.

And Lovelace serves on the Cancer League of Colorado's committee for its annual “Over the Edge” event. Volunteers rappel over the edge of one of Denver's high-rise buildings — approximately 30 stories tall — to raise money for cancer research.

“My team and I do quite a bit of philanthropy,” she says. “I'm fortunate to have a business that's able to give back for silent auctions and charities, but also to give of our ourselves. That's extremely important.”

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A critical component to her success, Lovelace will tell you, is the team with which she surrounds herself.

“The biggest mistake I made when I first opened my Denver location 13 years ago is I hired based on talent first,” she says. “Now I realize you hire based on

personality first and talent second . . . Talent is one thing, but if you don't have the right personality — we're in the service industry. Everything should be about that guest walking through that door.”

The first two years were tough.

“I really didn't know what I was getting into, and I thought it would be easier than it was,” Lovelace says. “I was the fifth Woodhouse to open in the country and the first in the state of Colorado, so I was a no-name. But I worked every day from open to close, and when the spa was closed I networked. And I went to charity events and I got involved in the community and got to know people . . . and I did that for three years.”

She also had to learn how to manage people who were unlike her hard-charging self. Her staff, she says, “does this because it's about touch with intent. It's not about drivers. They're more givers, so they need to be treated differently — we

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Relationship with WhippleWood is like family

Tina Lovelace credits WhippleWood CPAs with changing her life.

“I know that sounds dramatic,” she says, “but it’s true. Not only did they come in and clean up my previous accountant’s mess, they taught me to be self-sufficient.”

In the process, the firm has become an extension of her team, “a part of her family,” Lovelace says.



Esely

WhippleWood became Lovelace’s accountant in 2009, five years after she opened The Denver Woodhouse Day Spa. Her previous accountant, she says, had done a poor job of managing the accounts of a complex operation and also charged Lovelace for tasks she could have done on her own — and for much less money.

Such as periodic annual filings.

“It’s just a matter of going online, filing a report, paying a \$10 fee and it’s done,” Lovelace says. “Kim’s like, ‘Why are you paying to do that when you can do that yourself?’”

Kim is Kim Esely, WhippleWood’s director of client services, who meets with Lovelace regularly and talks with her on the phone a few times a week.

Esely also taught her to download the businesses’ credit card transactions and expenses into Quickbooks. She helps with reconciling accounts and reviews profit-and-loss statements. The team working with Lovelace includes Wendy Ciancio, director of accounting; partner George Hoge, who talks tax strategies and issues; and Mitch Clark, who works with tax preparation and planning.

“We have a great working relationship,” Esely says.

Lovelace, noting the importance of

meeting in person to keep the relationship “strong and tight,” agrees.

And, she adds, “they’re all very good about giving sound advice.”

Esely will even step in to help with liquor licenses and sales tax renewals or evaluate insurance costs. The goal is to provide Lovelace with the details she needs “at her fingertips,” Esely says, “then she’s able to run her business more effectively.”

Esely also has accompanied Lovelace to a couple of the Woodhouse franchise reunions, which gives her added insight into the business.

“She’s doing amazing,” Esely says.

And it’s been fun to watch the business take off.

“Whatever she needs us to do, we’ll do,” Esely says. “We’re her right-hand person.”

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all need to be treated based on our personality types. I didn’t quite understand that when I got into this business.”

Today, she says, “we’re really like a big family.”

Her staff agrees.

“We have a really strong and empowered team of people,” says Tanya Rabinowitz, general manager of the Denver Woodhouse, who joined Lovelace’s team in March after a number of years working in the spa industry.

“It starts above with Tina,” she says. “It’s important to have someone like her who is business-minded and successful . . . and compassionate.”

Lovelace knows she has come a long way.

She’s most proud to have built a business that contributes to the economy, one that provides a living to more than 100 people while helping thousands of others de-stress, rejuvenate and celebrate themselves and the life around them.

These days, she can even take weekends off.

“Since I have surrounded myself with experienced people who are like-minded, I can take comfort in knowing that they’re taking ownership and treating this as if it were their own.”

But don’t expect to see her taking advantage of a massage in one of her spas.

“It’s hard for me to relax, first of all,” she says, smiling. But “if I’m on a massage table, say at my Denver location, I could be on the third floor. I can hear a phone ring . . . I’m on the face cradle and looking down, thinking, ‘OK, somebody needs to vacuum.’ It’s the attention to detail. It’s hard to turn off. Quite honestly, my spa is really my office.”