

BUSINESSEXTRA

Looks play big part in job hunt

More people using cosmetic surgery to increase their appeal to employers

By Stephen Higgins
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COVER STORY

"My eyes made me look sad and tired. It's not what [potential employers] want someone to look like."

Carol, a 51-year-old plastic surgery patient

FAIRFIELD — Carol, a 51-year-old divorcee, has been looking for a full-time job as an administrative assistant for 1½ years.

"There is heavy competition in Connecticut," said Carol, a Fairfield resident who asked that her last name not be used.

So Carol took what some might consider a drastic step: In October she underwent plastic surgery to "lift" her eyes and eyebrows.

Carol said her eyes had become droopy and "tired" looking, and she was afraid they were turning off potential employers. "My eyes made me look sad and tired. It's not what they want someone to look like," Carol said.

The surgeon who lifted Carol's eyes, Dr. Neil Gordon of Fairfield, said more and more people are seeking cosmetic surgery for career-related reasons.

As baby boomers age and downsizing continues, competition for jobs is heating up. A lot of people are convinced that a youthful appearance has become a key ingredient in career success.

"As we age, our eyebrows may drop and project a negative attribute in our body language that may or may not reflect how we feel inside," said Gordon, a plastic surgeon with Ear, Nose, Throat & Facial Plastic Surgery Associates in Fairfield and a faculty member at the Yale School of Medicine.

"People who have negative emotions connected to their face are going to be less likely to come across well," Gordon said.

Among all of his patients who come in strictly for cosmetic work, the number who are motivated by career considerations has increased from about 30 percent in 1988 to 50 percent or 60 percent today, Gordon said.

And while the majority of cosmetic surgery patients are still women, the percentage of men has

jumped from 7 percent to 15 percent, Gordon said.

Dr. Jeffrey L. Benjamin, attending plastic surgeon at Stamford Hospital and assistant clinical professor at New York Medical College, agreed that more men are coming in for cosmetic procedures.

"A lot of people in the workplace find themselves competing with younger people, and they are coming in," said Benjamin, who said the trend has been building for a decade. "The main change has been the number of men."

Benjamin said a big factor has been society's increasing acceptance of plastic surgery.

"Before, it was something people felt only movie stars did. Now average people are having it done every day," he said.

A recent survey by the American Academy of Facial Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery bears that out. The academy reported the number of face lifts soared 178 percent between 1989 and 1993. Eye lifts have risen 95 percent in the same period.

Another recent survey, conducted by the American Association of Retired Persons, showed that a



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Dr. Neil Gordon of Fairfield says more people are seeking cosmetic surgery.

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