

Welcome to our spa issue. It's full of wonderful stories, some heart-warming and some frightening.

For massage therapists the land of spa is akin to a fairy tale, complete with princesses, heroes, and ogres.

So enter our first maiden, Nina Howard. Her story begins in a small cottage in Ann Arbor, Mich., when she moved away from her interior design career to become a massage therapist.

In the early '90s her vision evolved. "I started out as a massage therapist just doing massage. Then I added a mud wrap. I added Belavi Facelift Massage. I added body polish. Voila! I had a spa in my home."

Soon she was a licensed esthetician, had hired 10 employees and, yes, had to move out of the little house. "I was doing all the right things at the right time and got a lot of

attention in my community," she says. Since her expanded location opened in 1997, she's hosted 28,000 clients and now has 30 employees. In December 2002, she unveiled the new Bellanina Day Spa, and brought her vision of wellness to life. And in February she was honored with the Distinguished Day Spa Award 2005 by the Day Spa Association.

Ah, but we're turning the pages too fast. Often when Howard's telling her story, a dewey-eyed student will say, "I want to start a day spa!"

Enter reality, Howard-style. "Do you want to give up your private life for three to five years? Do you want to work 365/24/7?" she asks. "It took years before I had any money to spend on myself. It all had to go back into the business. Are you up for this? If you are, go for it, but do your homework. Have money to live on for at least the first year."

Now that her dreams are finally coming true, Howard concentrates on living her mantra. When I spoke with her to learn about her magic potion she was on a personal retreat at

Optimum Health Institute in Austin, Texas. She escapes there a couple weeks a year to detox and recharge. "If you give your body a chance to rejuvenate, you can be better at everything.

When I leave here, I'm in love with life again. I put so much energy and passion into my work, I have to have a break and rebalance."

That attitude translates to her employees as well. At Bellanina, massage therapists work six-hour days, five days a week.

"Our employees' day is so diverse. They stay fresh and excited about their jobs," she says. "They're getting an opportunity to use their brains and not just their hands."

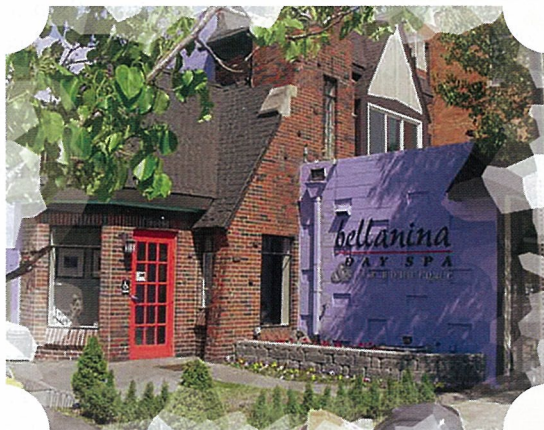
Howard's also not afraid to cite a high-profile example of a posh spa that works its MTs 10-12 hours a day. We hear those stories throughout the year. Yet in an economic climate

that's extremely challenging for independent bodyworkers, spas are major employers. So this issue includes a cover story by spa analyst Mary Bemis

that delves into the relationships between spas, practitioners, and even schools. We have another reality check for those wanting to start a spa from consultant Steve Capellini, commentary from educator Thomas Myers, and a look at spa charity efforts from contributing editor Karrie Osborn.

If you're a committed independent, we have other features to help boost your knowledge and inspire you: a personal journal on massage in Cambodia from bodyworker Anna Kania, straight talk from Erik Dalton on scoliosis, an essay on escaping from protocol by Ray Bishop, Jr., and a look at massage for golfers.

But if you still have spa fairy tales dancing in your head, Howard will give you the nod and warn you about the trolls. "It's very fulfilling," she says. "(You) have no idea how hard it is, but there's a reward there."



The Fairy-Tale Issue

Leslie