

LADIBUGS INC.

Moms take up fight with lice

By Meryn Fluker
CORRESPONDENT

When a child has head lice, the whole family is invested, and sometimes, the whole family is infested. Just ask Rachel Knutson and Lisa Rudquist.

The pair has a lot of lice stories. There was one about the mom who had more than 200 bugs combed from her hair. Then there's the nanny who got it from the kids she works with. Then there are the families that can't get rid of the lice infestations, so everyone just keeps passing it around.

All of Knutson and Rudquist's yarns come back to their own experiences, which led the registered nurses to start Ladibugs Inc., a lice-removal company.

Knutson, of Prior Lake, stayed up until 2 a.m. one evening, picking nits out of her daughter Ella's hair, only to resume the following morning after attempting to delouse her entire house.

"You look around your house and it's like, 'Everything's contaminated,'" Knutson said.

Rudquist's daughter Sierra, 7, came home complaining of an itchy head, and then "we began the whole process," Rudquist said.

Knutson described her Internet search as "frantic" the night she discovered Ella's head lice.

"I was desperate," Knutson said. "I was basically in tears."

She wanted someone to help her out and she didn't know what to do or who to call, a feeling Rudquist shared.

"I felt like I couldn't call anyone," she said. "Who wants to announce that you have head lice?"

Knutson and Rudquist both didn't know what to do or what they were looking for. They bought over-the-counter shampoos for their daughters and tried all kinds of creative options to get rid of the lice.

Knutson was desperate: Her husband was out of town, and she had to get her family onto a plane the next day. She searched online for help. There, Knutson found the advice to use mayonnaise to suffocate the lice, so she lathered Ella's hair with mayo.

Rudquist, of Savage, was equally creative. Having read that lice and nits die at 130 degrees Fahrenheit, Rudquist took her flat-iron (which gets as hot as 200 degrees) to Sierra's hair. Even though all the nits died, Rudquist managed to melt them to Sierra's hair.

Knutson over-treated Ella's head lice, washing her hair daily for four days with the over-the-counter lice-removal shampoo, even though the



STAFF PHOTO BY MERYN FLUKER

Addie Knutson, age 5, gets her hair combed with a fine-tooth louse comb by Lisa Rudquist. This step, known as the comb out, comes after the Lousebuster has been applied.

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Ladibugs Inc.

instructions said to wash once and repeat a week later.

All of this drama, which might be enough to make someone tear out their hair, compelled Knutson and Rudquist to tear out other people's hair - or rather, tear lice and nits from other people's hair.

Although their daughters had always been friends and attended preschool together and both were in first grade at St. Paul's Lutheran School in Prior Lake, the mothers didn't immediately turn to each other when lice visited their daughters' heads. When Knutson found out that Sierra had head lice, she stopped Rudquist in the St. Paul's parking lot and commented about the lack of support services in the area.

That afternoon is when Ladibugs took flight.

"I said, 'I will have you know that there is no company in Minnesota that can help you with that,'" Knutson told Rudquist.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking? We can do that," Rudquist responded.

Ultimate nitpickers

Less than two weeks later, Knutson and Rudquist's company incorporated.

After receiving a call, the pair arranges to meet the client at his or her home.

There, Knutson and Rudquist check everyone for infestation. Then they use a device known as a Lousebuster, which is similar to a blow dryer with a diffuser-like tip, to kill lice and eggs.

Knutson and Rudquist are both trained on and certified to operate the device, which blows hot air onto the hair and scalp at a temperature hot enough to kill lice and nits, yet still lower than some blow dryers. The treatment takes about 30 to 45 minutes.

Then, Knutson and Rudquist apply natural and organic hair care products to the scalp and perform a "comb through," using a fine-tooth louse comb to rid the scalp and hair of lice and nits.

Knutson and Rudquist not only make house calls, but they also have done treatments in living rooms and bedrooms so clients can be comfortable and even watch TV.

"As many treatments and head checks as we've done, we're really getting it down," Rudquist said.

Ladibugs also offers consultations about getting rid of lice in the home. Knutson and Rudquist will take parents around their homes to find problem areas and let them know how to properly clean and get rid of lice.

"Really, the consultation is the educational perspective of

where lice live," Rudquist said. "If you don't do that while you're in someone's home, you're really missing the boat."

A desperate move

Rudquist and Knutson openly discuss the stigma attached with head lice. Even though head lice infestations are common at schools and daycares across the country, many people demand the utmost discretion when their children are involved.

Rudquist and Knutson have fielded questions from clients about whether the vehicle they drive for their business has any sort of signs announcing that they are lice fighters (it doesn't), and one daycare even cancelled scheduled head checks from Ladibugs out of a fear that the parents would be riled up in a frenzy over a possible lice infestation.

"That's what's really sad," Knutson said. "That's the stigma."

Traditionally people with lice have been thought to be dirty, a negative connotation Rudquist said can't be further from the truth. "Here's the irony: Lice love clean hair," she said. "They need to attach to a clean hair shaft."

Knutson and Rudquist go to great lengths to make sure they don't bring lice home to their families, wearing full-body coats and caps and using new gloves and combs for each client.

But they also try to incorporate humor during appointments. They said one dad even got in on the act, greeting them with, "You guys came in the nit of time."

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