

# SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

## BUSINESS JOURNAL

### Massage Therapy Schools Feeling Boost in Business

By Andrea Alegria

As unemployment rises, and more people are forced to explore new career opportunities, massage therapy, one of the nation's fastest growing professions, is luring prospects to established schools in the San Fernando Valley such as the National Holistic Institute in Encino.

Student enrollment there has increased 35 percent so far this year, said campus manager Joe Bob Smith, and despite the crumbling economy, job listings are as robust as ever.

"We're placing 95 percent of our graduates in massage jobs, which for a vocational school is almost unheard of," Smith said.

In 2007, NHI's Encino campus placement rate was 87 percent.

"There's a lot of massage jobs out there, in fact we get more calls for jobs than students we have to fill them," he said.

NHI is a long established nationally accredited school with over 22 years of history in the San Fernando Valley, and is part of a larger school with campuses in San Jose, San Francisco, Emeryville and Petaluma...

#### A growing field

While it is not uncommon for most vocational schools to see increased enrollment during times of high unemployment – as people out of work think it's a



Students at National Holistic Institute perform Shiatsu

good time to get re-trained and learn new skills – Smith said the massage therapy industry in California has especially benefited from the downturn.

Students are lured by the relatively short and affordable training as well as the prospect of good pay and a flexible work schedule. But more importantly, he added, there has been a gradual change in how the industry is perceived over the last few years with it increasingly being considered a part of the healthcare industry.

"More people are aware of accepting massage and are viewing it as a part of healthcare," he said.

Recently passed California legislation, which created a Massage Therapy Council to oversee the industry and issue statewide certifications to massage therapists, will further legitimize it, Smith said.

"It certainly raises the profile of the profession and I think going into the future, it's just going to get even bigger."

Massage therapy is already among California's 50 fastest-growing positions, according to the Economic Development Department, which projects job openings to increase by about 26 percent statewide by 2016.

"It's a very promising career and if you like helping people, it's very rewarding," said NHI student Hector Nuñez, who plans to open his own office focusing on deep tissue and sports massage in the San Fernando Valley.

Recent NHI graduate Hillary Holweg said she is also confident that her field will offer promising opportunities.

"So far, I've never had a problem getting clients and I think it's only going to get better."

Holweg became interested in massage therapy after bouncing around from job to job with no clear career path. She graduated from NHI six months ago and quickly found a job at Massage Masters on Ventura Boulevard in Sherman Oaks.

"It's been a life changing experience. I had been a receptionist, a barista at a coffee shop, I was working in retail, but now I work three days a week, I give three to five massages a day, and it definitely pays my bills" she said...

Nationally, the industry's rapid growth exploded between 2004-2006 and has started leveling off in the last couple of years, according to the Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals, the largest massage membership association in the United States with more than 65,000 members.