

THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

InkLifters removes tattoos with ease

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The reasons people give for having their tattoos removed can be surprising. Sure, some want tattoos blotted out because they are no longer romantically involved with the one whose name is inked across their arm or chest. Many want the marks removed to forget about things in their past that don't conform to their present lifestyle.

Others want to supplant old designs with new ones. People who are older and have tattoos that have been misshaped by gravity often want the marks removed. Still others are looking for a way to have the medical tattoos they received during radiation treatments erased.

Whatever the reason, **InkLifters** is able to do the job. The business in the Union Heights Plaza touts itself as the first business in Utah devoted exclusively to laser-tattoo removal. "Now you have an option" is the business' tag line.

InkLifters co-owner Steve Carlston thought up the concept for the business about a year ago. He had been in the banking business for seven years and wanted the opportunity to "build something of his own." He saw a need for tattoo removal and was excited to be involved in something new and unique.

Carlston later partnered with Lynn McMillan, a licensed nurse practitioner with a background in dermatology, who has been in the medical profession her entire career. She worked for many years in the field of wound care, and for the past year has specialized in aesthetic-laser practice. The third member of the **InkLifters** team is sales consultant Teresa Amussen. She had worked with McMillan at another clinic and they "clicked," so Amussen jumped at the chance to work with her again in this new venture.

If business is brisk at **InkLifters**, a survey Northwestern University conducted last year shows why. The study noted 36 percent of Americans ages 18 to 19 have tattoos; 24 percent of Americans ages 18 to 50 have tattoos. What's more, about 50 percent of respondents in the study said they suffered from "tattoo regret." In other words, they wish they had opted against getting a tattoo.

Until recently, though, removing tattoos was not safe or effective. The methods were painful and often yielded varying and disappointing results, including burning, scarring and trauma to the skin.

InkLifters officials say their state-of-the-art laser technology safely removes all or parts of most tattoos without bleeding and with minimal risk of scarring or damage to the skin. Even colors in tattoos that were previously deemed untouchable can now be removed.

Each case is different, and the number of treatments required to remove a tattoo depends on the color, depth and chemical composition of the ink as well as the person's skin pigment and immune system. **InkLifters** offers free consultations to assess individual needs.

McMillan has seen the results of other methods of tattoo removal and says that it isn't pretty. Much of this relates to the use of outdated laser technology that causes scarring and skin damage; however, there are some extreme cases where acid has been used or a tattoo has actually been cut out.

"All some people do is trade a tattoo for an ugly scar," McMillan says.

Adds Carlston: "We can typically remove ink left from other treatments, but cannot fix the scarring or skin damage."

Four years ago, Jason Harris of West Jordan let a friend use a homemade gun to tattoo the words "BORN DEAD" across his knuckles.

"It looked horrible," he recalls. "It was faded, uneven and barely readable. I figured the tattoo would always be there. I had seen the scarring, blood and cost associated with tattoo removal and it didn't seem worth it to me."

When he heard of **InkLifters**, though, Harris decided to give it a try. He says the procedure took five minutes.

"After it was done, my fingers were a little red and I felt like I had a bad burn for a couple of hours," he adds. "By the next morning, the red was gone, with no trace of the ink and absolutely no pain. It is great to have this kind of choice available, and I am going to get my knuckles redone professionally."

When Rachelle Jelosek had a gecko tattooed on her ankle when she was 19, she thought it was a great idea. She feels differently now.

"I can't tell you how many times I have put on a nice dress to go out somewhere, only to glance down at my ankle and see a painful reminder of my impulsive teenage years staring right back at me," she says.

Like Harris, Jelosek had her tattoo removed.

"The removal process has basically been pain-free," she says. "There is a little discomfort during the actual laser process, but that only lasts a few minutes and it actually hurts less than when I got the tattoo. . . . I am very impressed with the results."

Brittney White of Millcreek tells a similar story.

"I was 18 when I got my tattoo," she says. "The artist had a whole different idea of what I wanted than I did. From day one, I have not loved my tattoo so I wanted to have it removed. I would still get another one, but with much more thought. My dealings with **InkLifters** have been very satisfactory. Their office is very clean and the staff is easy to work with."

Sarvas Berry of Sugar House is in the process of having his entire right sleeve removed so he can change his look with new tattoos. Before discovering **InkLifters**, he checked out several possibilities that were either short on technology or long on price.

Berry even contacted a company in North Carolina that has an older version of the laser that **InkLifters** uses, but ultimately decided he couldn't afford to fly back and forth for the number of treatments he needed.

Berry is pleased with his progress thus far, and he even videotaped his first tattoo-removal session and posted it on YouTube, a popular video-sharing Web site. He is impressed with the customer service provided by the staff at **InkLifters**.

"They've called me to make sure everything is OK and even stopped by where I work to check on me," he says.

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