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He cuts away rough edges

By **BRIDGET B. WINSTON** | Staff Writer

The Discovery Channel and a local plastic surgeon are looking for a diamond in the rough. Dr. Tom Roberts will perform an "extreme makeover" for The Discovery Channel this spring, and he and the network are searching for a participant. Roberts' practice, located in The Physician Center at Spartanburg Regional, is accepting applications through Jan. 29 for people willing to undergo several cosmetic procedures in front of television cameras. Roberts will screen the applicants and send a list of finalists to the television station for final selection.

The surgery will take place in early March, Roberts said. The television crews will also do interviews with the patient before the surgery, and follow up several weeks later to show the changes. And naturally, to make good TV even better, the show is looking for a candidate with a dramatic story -- someone who wants to shape up before a wedding or start a new life after a divorce, for example.

The show is scheduled to air in May.

Roberts already has nipped, tucked, lifted and sculpted his way into the national -- and international -- spotlight.

He was among the first surgeons to use lasers for plastic surgery, and since he began in 1994, he has been invited to present his research and procedures around the world. His patients also come from across the country and around the globe after researching his credentials and viewing before-and-after photos of his procedures.

He performed an extreme makeover on Spartanburg resident Tiffany Moss for the Fox News show "The Pulse" last spring. ABC's "Good Morning America" planned to feature him in a segment on buttock augmentation, but deemed it too "risqué" at the last minute, Roberts said. He also has been featured in more than 30 fashion and news magazines.

"This is something I've been doing for a long time and they finally put a name to it," Roberts said. The Discovery Channel originally contacted him last year to do an extreme makeover. But just before filming was scheduled to begin, the patient became pregnant and the procedure was canceled. This time, the show is looking for a candidate under the age of 35 who is within 20 pounds of his or her ideal body weight. The ideal candidate will also be someone who wants to improve a facial feature.

The last extreme makeover Roberts performed, for example, included sculpting the cheekbones and chin, a nose job, liposuction in the face and hips and breast augmentation.

The patient who is selected for the show will have to pay a small fee based on the surgeries performed. Normally, having several procedures performed can total between \$10,000 and \$30,000. Roberts said the fee is a way to weed out applicants who only have a casual interest in plastic surgery.

"If you said it's totally free, you'd have 1,000 people show up," Roberts said. "I want someone who is totally serious about it and will take care of themselves."

Before any cosmetic plastic surgery, Roberts and his staff have lengthy discussions with his patients about the risks of plastic surgery.

"Like any surgery, it's real surgery," Roberts said. "Some people think it's like getting their hair done."

Roberts also talks to the patients about their motivation for making the changes and their dedication to taking care of themselves after the surgery.

"We do a lot of psychology. They need to do it for the right reasons," Roberts said. "You want to do it for yourself, not for anyone else."

Many of Roberts' patients come to him because they've tried diet and exercise but they can't get rid of their love handles or saddle bags. Roberts can remove the fat cells with liposuction, but he wants a commitment that they will maintain their new weight.

"If I can remove the bulges, they can do the rest with diet and exercise," he said.

Roberts said he performs more than 100 liposuction surgeries each year, and just as many breast augmentations. Older patients usually want face lifts. Most of Roberts' patients are women, although he has done plenty of surgeries on men. Younger men usually want nose jobs or liposuction, while older men want face lifts, brow lifts or eyelid lifts.

Many of Roberts patients are from the retirement communities in the Hendersonville, N.C., area, where Roberts has a second office. They look older and more tired than they really are, and it changes their self-image and how others see them, Roberts said.

"They find that when they start looking old, they start getting treated like fuddy-duddys," Roberts said. "When we make them look 10-15 years younger, they're treated that way."

Roberts prides himself on crafting improvements that make a dramatic difference without looking unnatural. Many of his patients come for small nips and tucks over several visits for a gradual change to their appearance, he said.

"Basically I have spent the last several years of my life getting good results without it looking like anything has been done," Roberts said. "They want it to look natural."

But the real results are not in the improved faces and figures of his patients, but in their improved outlooks on life.

"We see people blossom," Roberts said. "There are people who are kind of homely and had low self-esteem. (After the surgery) they feel better about themselves and it spills over to everything else -- their relationships with a significant other, their careers.

"You give people the gift of themselves."

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