



3 ON YOUR SIDE

Cosmetology school closes, students left wondering

05:30 PM Mountain Standard Time on Wednesday, August 15, 2007

By Gary Harper / 3TV reporter

Dozens of Valley people are concerned they may be out thousands of dollars because the cosmetic school they were attending shut down.

Not only did the school shut down, but students say there was absolutely no warning sign given.

The name of the school is Arizona Esthetic Institute located in North Phoenix.

Students, mostly women, claim they gave the school thousands of dollars so they could get a degree, but then the school closed up.

"Nothing, it's empty. I feel so betrayed. I really do," said student Crystal Hillman, looking at what used to be her locker.

Hillman is just one of several students told to clean out her locker and to leave the school.

"I really feel like I was going to a funeral this morning. I was sick to my stomach," she said.

The Arizona Esthetic Institute is licensed with the State Board of Cosmetology.

Donna Aune is with the cosmetology board and she said she was just as surprised to hear about the closing as the students.

"You know what? It's their education. They put in their hours and they come one day and it's not open and they have no idea what to do," she said.

The owner of the school is listed as Garrett Stephenson.

According to the Cosmetology Board and a school rep, he's a former Major League Baseball player with the St. Louis Cardinals.

But why he closed the school down is unknown.

In the meantime, students say they gave thousands of dollars for the classes, and many of those classes they haven't even taken yet.

As for a refund?

One student, Carole Williams, said she gave the institute \$11,000.

She said she's getting back \$2,000.

Hillman says she's in the hole for \$10,000.

But with all the mess, there is hope for these students. Owners of the other cosmetology schools in the Valley are stepping up and offering to teach some of the classes that many of the students have paid for and didn't take.

One of those owners is KC Miller with Southwest Institute of Natural Aesthetics. She doesn't want the industry in Phoenix to get a black eye.

"If they paid for it, we will provide the training," Miller said.

Despite what could be a financial burden, Miller said it's not as much of a burden as getting a reputation they can't be trusted.

That's great news to students like Hillman. But she like others are still upset over the school's abrupt closure.

"It's frustrating -- really frustrating," she said.

Late Wednesday afternoon, 3 On Your Side spoke with Stephenson who called from Idaho.

He's the former baseball player who owned the school.

He said that he is merely a financier behind the school and that he bought it for a family member who ran the school into the ground.

Stephenson said he is personally out \$450,000 and unfortunately had to pull the plug.