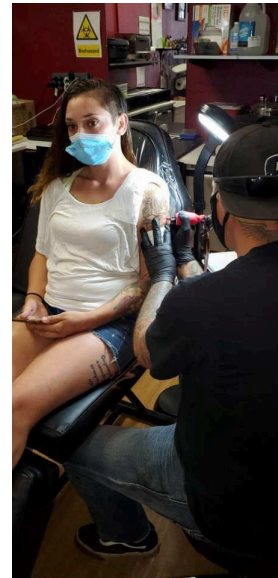


Tattoo artists happy to have clients back

July 6, 2020



Growing up, Moises Montanez never liked much being in class. He'd rather sit in the back and draw.

"The teacher looked at my drawings and said I'd never amount to anything in life with that," Montanez said.

Today, the walls of Starboard Tattoo Parlor are adorned with samples of his drawings, and Montanez has successfully inked them onto human canvases over the last decade.

He and other tattoo artists in Crescent City are back at their craft thanks to the state lifting the social distancing ban on the industry. The State Health Department (CDPH) and the governor's office now allows Del Norte and some other counties to further relax restrictions, allowing more businesses to reopen. In addition to tattoo businesses, the order allowed massage, facial and manicure services to resume June 19.

Levi Prince, owner of another Crescent City shop, Fine Line Design, said he was surprised the ban was lifted on tattoo parlors.

"Shocked, to be honest," Prince said. "I didn't think we'd see any work until next year."

Both Prince and Montanez said because there are already so many regulations on the tattooing industry to keep a sterile environment, just about the only thing they've had to add is to have the artists and customers wear masks.

Prince said social distancing guidelines have been implemented, with only one artist and one client allowed per workstation and no bystanders. The lobby has also been set up to keep those waiting six feet apart at all

times. Montanez works solo in the tattooing area, but has plans to expand in the upcoming months.

Both shops are also only taking clients by appointment, although Prince said he's willing to work with walk-ins if they have no symptoms of the virus.

Matt Pincombe came down from Brookings to be one of Montanez's first customers since the reopening.

"I was stoked," Pincombe said as Montanez worked on his second tattoo, this one on his shoulder. "I messaged Moises every couple of weeks, asking, 'Are you open? Are you open? Are you open?'"

Annelise Huppert was excited to get back into a Fine Line Design chair so her fiancé Shaugn McEvoy could finish her 12th tattoo, another on her left arm dedicated to their son Odin.

"I was happy he went back to work," Huppert said.

McEvoy, new to Fine Line, had just set up a client list and finished two tattoos when the shutdown went into effect. He spent the downtime with family and working on planning future projects.

Prince, who's owned Fine Line Design for more than 11 years, said since tattoo artists are independent contractors, they were ineligible for regular unemployment (although they may be eligible for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance).

"Luckily, the building owner hadn't charged me rent. I've got great landlords, really understanding," Prince added.

Also, luckily for Montanez, he had a second job as a life coach for the mentally disabled to help keep up with out of pocket payments for his shop's bills.

Montanez is looking at the bright side of the shutdown. With a full schedule, he reevaluated his priorities and decided to commit full-time to his first love.

"I just gave my two-week's notice at my other job," he said. "I know this is what I want to do. I told myself I should have done this a lot sooner."