

Area residents leave heads spinning with celebrity likenesses



Sonya Visor, right, and Oprah Winfrey

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For a sure-fire conversation starter, here's an idea.

First, look like someone famous. OK, so it's not easy, but it works. Just ask Kathie Heineck, a receptionist at Great Lakes Dermatology in Racine. A few times a day, new patients or acquaintances remark that she looks like actress Helen Hunt, who won an Oscar for her performance in "As Good as it Gets" and co-starred on the NBC sitcom "Mad About You."

"It's really a good conversation piece," said Heineck, 38. "... It gets people going a little bit."

But those who have a famously familiar face said it can be a little unnerving. "I used to wonder why people were staring at me," Heineck said. "I was starting to get a complex about it."

Now she is used to it. When she sees that certain look in a stranger's eyes, she knows what's coming: the familiar refrain, "You know who you look like?"

Sometimes the reaction goes further. While Heineck was working in retail, one regular customer was convinced that Heineck and Hunt were long-lost sisters. "(She) was positive that Helen Hunt's family gave me up for adoption."

Few of us ever will know real fame -- Andy Warhol's maxim about 15 minutes of fame notwithstanding. However, there are those who know what it feels like to look like a celebrity.

"When I go into the store, I hear it all the time," said Sonya Visor, sales coordinator at Kranz in Racine. "It" is her likeness to the queen of day-time talk shows, Oprah Winfrey.

"Here at work it's a common joke: What's my talk show today?" Visor said. "It's fun, because I like her. I just get double looks."

In fact, Visor, 34, almost parlayed the physical similarity into an appearance on "Oprah." Winfrey had planned a show based on the theme of look-alikes and asked viewers for photos. Those plans were shelved, but Visor was told the Oprah-like photo she sent will be saved in case the idea is revived.

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