



HEAD START
STUDENTS AT THE KABUL BEAUTY SCHOOL PRACTICE STYLING TECHNIQUES ON PERFECTLY MADE-UP MANNEQUINS. BELOW: THE DIRECTOR, DEBBIE RODRIGUEZ (RIGHT), WITH BEAUTY-SCHOOL GRADUATES.

kabul cut & color

How a California mayor left the world of parking violations and moved over a beauty parlor in Afghanistan.

By Rosemary Stasek.



i live above a beauty parlor in Kabul, with 52 birds, two puppies, and a dancing plumber. In Afghanistan, salons have a troubled reputation. They were closed down by the Taliban in the mid-1990s, accused of being fronts for prostitution. (Actually, that's the Chinese restaurants. There are about three dozen in town, and only two serve food.) Which means that my circumstances are the social equivalent of living upstairs from a brothel. As it happens, the company is just as entertaining, but the customers don't keep you up all night.

Kabul is a long way from Mountain View, California, a high-tech town of 75,000 in the middle of Silicon Valley where I spent eight years on the city council, two of them as vice mayor and mayor, before moving here. I began to learn about Afghanistan and meet some of its former citizens when the glare of international attention descended on them immediately after September 11. The San Francisco Bay area has the largest Afghan community in the country—refugees who escaped the Soviet invasion in the early 1980s—but they had always been low-profile and self-contained, and they were quite unused *up front* >156