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MATTHEW PURDY/Our Towns

You Can Be Too Thin. Ask the Guys Who Pine for a Comb.

GREENWICH, CONN.

YOU guys can dig in with your fingers," said a man at the front of the room, offering his dark hair for examination. No one touched, but a couple of men circled around him, peering at his head as if it were a moon rock.

It might as well have been. In a room of the follically challenged, the hair stood out as a beacon of darkness in a sea of shining pates.

The man was a star of a hair transplantation seminar here the other night, a kind of Tupperware Party for men without lids, where guys could let their hairlessness down knowing someone would understand.

"I always hid it pretty well until my fiancée noticed it," said a man named Mike. "That just kind of threw me over the edge."

Said another: "I saw pictures of myself and said, 'That's not me. I'm a long-haired hippie.'"

It's not surprising that men are pouring the kind of energy into re-seeding their heads they once reserved for manicuring the front lawn. Laser surgery can zap away myopia, cellulite can be vacuumed up, various body parts can be enhanced, reduced, tucked and nipped. Farm animals can be

cloned, for heaven's sake! So what about baldness, the final frontier? There's no cure, but new drugs and procedures are giving men options beyond wigs that make them look like clown-college grads or transplants that look like corn fields.

It was fitting that Dr. Ivan S. Cohen, whose Fairfield dermatology practice is increasingly hair-centric, brought his road show to a hotel in Greenwich, a capital of the age of endless possibility.

"It's like a miracle," gushed one of his successes to prospective patients. "You can take one part of your body and it can grow on another part of your body."

The gathering seemed at times like an all-male production of "The Vagina Monologues."

"Did you go through a moral dilemma?" one patient, Mark Kaplowe, 41, who does ad voiceovers, asked another. "'Why am I so vain? I'm not losing a limb.'"

They talked about personal stuff in terms of money and cars.

"I think you should be able to invest in yourself," the other patient said, "especially if it's going to have long-term return."

Mr. Kaplowe said he thought about his transplant this way: "If I do this, it's going

A doctor's hair-centric practice creates a guilt-free vanity zone.

to grow forever. If I buy a car, in three years I'm going to be trading it in."

Dr. Cohen's guilt-free vanity zone fit the emerging theory that men are people, too. The author Susan Faludi wrote that society has stiffed men. The Promise Keepers fill stadiums with men who vow not just to hunt and gather, but to feel and commit. In parenting manuals, the agony of boys is catching up with the anxiety of girls.

"People say to me, why are you doing this?" said a 62-year-old banker. "They say, 'You're vain.' Everybody's vain about something." The back of the head ranks high for men.

"I have no aversion to balding men," said Tom Nevermann, 39, a relocation consultant. "I like that look. But I have a really ugly head. It's pointed. I don't know if I was

dropped as a baby on my head. I was saying to my friend, too bad they can't transplant the hair from my back. His response was: 'Curly's good.'"

Hair regeneration has become big business, as is clear from half-time commercials and ads in the sports section. Doctors like Dr. Cohen and his staff at the Center for Hair Transplantation are busier than ever grafting healthy hair onto barren scalps for an average of about \$10,000 a patient.

His session drew about 20 men. He showed before-and-after slides and recounted memorable patients, like a security guard who held a toga party honoring his new hair and burned his three toupees. Mostly he examined heads as if they were melons, taking questions like, "If you have a receding hairline in the front and balding in the back, do you first try to recreate the swirl or do you start with the front?"

"Good question," Dr. Cohen said.

When it was over, one question remained: What about you, Dr. Cohen?

"I have a high hairline and reasonable density," Dr. Cohen said, running his hand over his thinning hair. "I'm like 57 and I think I'm pretty good."

You're the expert, Doc.