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Seeking funds to expand

A U.S. non-profit helps women who want boob jobs find men who'll pay for them

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Candace Leadley is a self-taught house framer from Strathmore, Alta. She's also a "graduate" of Myfreeimplants.com, a California-based website where men finance breast enlargements for women around the world by donating what they like in return for custom photos, videos and online chat. Leadley's just raised the last dollar she needs for her surgery. That makes her Canada's first MFI "Hall-of-Famer" and the envy of the 3,500 or so women (about 100 of them Canadians) still begging for boobs online. But Leadley, 26, isn't celebrating. Instead, the single mom's fretting — about going to a 34 or 36C in a few weeks from the 29AA she was left with after breastfeeding her son seven years ago.

Her friends are all for it. "But it's like a first tattoo, right? You can't just go in there and say, 'I want this,' and then hate it the next day. I'm used to the way I am now. They could get in the way. Climbing through rafters, I don't want to get strung up on my breasts, right?" But she figures she could "just get them out" if necessary. She'd use MFI for that as well, since the site funds removals and replacements too — even breast reductions and sex changes, according to owners Jay Moore and Jason Grunstra.

On the phone from Calgary, Leadley sounds, well, young. Her favourite song is Guns N' Roses' Sweet Child O' Mine. For movies, she likes Flicka, Thir13en Ghosts — "anything scary, some that make me cry." Her implants may just fit that bill. She picked her surgeon out of the Yellow Pages. (MFI charges surgeons to advertise and list on its site, but they "don't have many links to Canadian surgeons," she explains.) He wasn't her first choice, but she'd heard that at \$8,500, he charged less.

Quit smoking, he told her. Don't lift things, don't return to work too fast. And long-term risks? She draws a blank. "He told me a lot. But do you think I could think right now?"

This all began — of course — at Pure, the Vegas nightclub frequented by Mariah Carey, Lindsay Lohan, and Paris Hilton. Moore, now 29, and Grunstra, 30, were there for a bachelor party. "It's Vegas, it's crazy, our waitress was trying to get a big tip from us, saying it's going toward her friend's boob job," Moore recites into his car phone from San Francisco. "We thought of passing the hat. Guys pay for this stuff? We realized they would." Moore had an M.B.A., college pal Grunstra had computer smarts . . .

At least that's the story he tells. There are more stories to MFI, and you couldn't make some of them up if you tried. You find them in a marathon of postings written to MFI men ("benefactors") by MFI women ("models"). This one, for instance, written at New Year's by "Allysa": "i'm home alone, bored

to poop. i'm on my bed blowing bubbles pasting my head on big boobed women on photoshop. come entertain me . . . you're bored, i'm bored. we can figure something out :)" Or from "Roxann": "2008 will be great, even better with a pair of perky C's."

But then you find this, from "Miss Poland," for whom the new year rang in at US\$4,569 short of her surgical bill: "I guess I really need to start hustling." From "Maeva": "Hello eerybody!! Why I don't receive message yet???? I'm sad Come on guy I'm waiting Kiss." From "Lori": "OMG I AM GOING TO KILL MYSELF WOW IAM CRYING SO MUCH: ALll my money is gone how can this happen you cant do this i worked so hard for this i cant belive it this site cheated me i was so close to my goal how can you take all my money away all my pictures jason f---ing answer me where is my money?"

Moore consults for other online social networks but says he works six MFI hours every day. "Jason goes to a nine-to-five but also puts in that kind of effort. Thousands of users need thousands of things." Lori will likely be just one more.

MFI is non-profit, says Moore, but while the 2006 federal tax return he provided shows no salaries drawn, it lists "partnership income" and labels the site a "domestic limited-liability company." From his home in L.A. Grunstra pegs donation income at US\$100,000 a month, and growth at 25 per cent, with all of this held until surgeries are paid for. This year alone that could yield the operators US\$140,000 in interest. Grunstra concedes it could all make a nice nest egg.

In Calgary, a pair of breasts runs to \$13,000, with the Canadian average around \$7,000. Toronto is cheapest. According to the Toronto Star, they run \$6,000 at one clinic, where a young mother had liposuction last fall and later died. Removals and replacements run higher, with most complications charged to the public system.

Since MFI pays surgeons direct, Miss Poland will never see cash however hard she tries, only an account balance. Like all MFI women, she struggles with the fastest way to build hers, especially as competitors sign on. Fetishes are big — dominatrixes do well, says Moore — though custom videos and amateur photos can go begging.

What works is putting in the hours. Successes say they've lived online, "messaging, messaging, messaging" to make each man they reach feel he's the only one. It's not about tricks, "just about being yourself. I always posted pictures of my daily life," "Dollface" emails from Columbus, Ohio. "Parties I was at. People I've met. Places I've been." She says she's 22, though her MySpace page, which she also emails, says she's 39.

But is MFI a porn site? It's definitely NSFW (Not Safe For Work). Couldn't she lose her dignity? "You're starting to offend me," she replies. "Some women may think it is, but it's whatever you make it. I don't do anything I'm not proud of. Who would want to?"

Men think it's a porn site, all right. "Drone," a Michigan business systems analyst in his 40s, has subscribed for two years. Pictures traded on MFI range from innocent to "classy nude" (as Leadley describes her efforts, before she quit nudity altogether) to explicit. Lately MFI has "definitely become more sexual," Drone says. "That's good or bad depending on your perspective." From his, it's bad — sort of. "An extreme close-up of someone's vagina isn't a picture I'd ask for," he says. But "I feel bad about it since it's a lot to share and then I don't appreciate it the way I should. But it's not about the picture, it's about the trust."

Here's a guy who hates The English Patient because its hero "is an adulterer" (on MFI, you read a lot about what movies people like), says he loves his wife, and volunteers exhaustively on the site. He posts "boob news" and jokes, devises contests, spotlights the underexposed, and bucks up the morose.

Drone's mix of solicitude and prurience is like Bill Johnson's. Johnson, 32, an account manager for Red

Bull in Kansas City, Mo., who goes by "William" online, says the pictures he buys pale next to MFI's charitable mission. "It's exciting that so many people want to help these girls. You wouldn't expect it, not for this cause." Johnson is an MFI main man to Montrealer Jenny Poussin, 25, a professional pin-up who's posed for Maxim. What made her thumbnail stand out for him, over 3,500 others? Johnson's slow-spoken, but here he gets animated. "There she was. And I'm like, wow. She was stunning. And then I'm like 'this girl does not need breast implants' — that was the best thing about her."

Drone and Johnson are the only "benefactors" who'll talk about MFI. "They're embarrassed, maybe?" Johnson ventures, when asked why others won't. Poussin puts it more bluntly: "Probably because they don't wanna look like perverts admitting they love big boobies! lol," she emails. She'd know. At her own expense six years ago, when she was 19, she increased her C cup to a D. Now she wants a DD for "the projection they'll give. They'll go more outwards. I have a small frame! If they're too wide they could look freakish."

One of a few professionals using MFI to augment their modelling income as well as their breasts, Poussin's not been online much, but in two months she's raised US\$2,500 of the US\$6,500 she needs. Her largest donation has been US\$250, her smallest US\$10. Her "Schoolgirl Jenny" clip fetched only US\$50, but she was making the video anyway, for her business. "MFI is GREAT!" she enthuses. "Everyone gets what they want!"

"Ryleigh," 26, measures "who knows? Maybe 32AA?" She's sick of shopping in children's wear but hasn't yet got what she wants from MFI — merely a C cup. Distracted by family, she's been on and off MFI as long as it's been around. She's the oldest active member. In Fort McMurray, Alta., where she's lived all her life, "guys make lots of money and buy their girlfriends tits," Ryleigh says. "But my money goes to my kids. On MFI, it can't. For me, it's the only way." She's tried everything except much nudity, and even made an impressive spoof of the Dove "True Colours" commercial that won her an MFI contest and a little extra credit. Lately favoured by Drone, and by "Shannon" in Australia, she finally reached her goal. Bypassing Edmonton doctors, this week she's in B.C., meeting with a surgeon whose "website looked amazing."

Ryleigh might have qualified for a non-collateralized loan at credit card rates from one of the "patient financing" outfits springing up everywhere lately, even in traditional banking, but most MFI women don't qualify. Candace Leadley searched for a loan for two years. "I made good money but it all came down to the ex, bad credit, that story." Traditional financing isn't dead yet, says Jay Moore, but social financing and cyberbegging is the wave of the future. Surgeons in the U.S. and Britain have criticized MFI widely, he exults, "but they take the money."

But last year, the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons warned U.K. women that MFI's process was "entirely inappropriate for what should be a life-changing decision." Dr. Greg Wiener, a plastic surgeon at Chicago's Resurrection hospital, told the Chicago Sun-Times that "anything that trivializes plastic surgery is dangerous. Myfreeimplants.com turns [it] into a contest." Moore responds that women can choose their own surgeons, provided they're board certified.

In Canada, where implant contests aren't new — a Calgary bar has done giveaways, an Ottawa radio station once ran an ad campaign for a "Breast Christmas Ever" competition — plastic surgeons have been surprisingly mum on MFI. None of the five Canadian cosmetic surgeons contacted to comment on the site, or their professional association, returned calls.

Ottawa's Pierre Blais, once a risk analyst for Health Canada who now evaluates failed implants, says MFI is "one more abuse" of the business of breasts. The medical community here is well aware that implants are dangerous, he says, but "they've been silenced or worn out. Speaking out is now contrary to association guidelines." You wonder what "William" in Kansas City would say to that. "They're embarrassed, maybe?"