

BUSINESS NEWS

Barbershop quartet works harmoniously

After 40 years, four cutters still coif your curls

By Lee Hayden
The Northside News

In 1966 Doug Roberts found that he needed more parking for his barbershop customers at the intersection of Sherman and Commercial Avenues. So he decided to move to the brand new Sherman Plaza mall where space was plentiful.

Since then, more than 60 businesses have come and gone in the shopping center, but Sherman Plaza Hairstyling still thrives as a neighborhood barbershop in its original location, almost exactly where the Bruns family farmhouse once stood.

The barbershop started with unpainted cinderblock walls and one unmotorized chair that had to be pumped by foot.

This was the era of the Vietnam War, the Beatles and long hair. Barbers at the shop often got caught in the middle of fights between parents and their children over how long to leave their hair. As the ones who paid the bills, the parents usually won.

Doug, originally from Arena, Wis., and a graduate of barber school in Chicago, laid the foundation for the remarkable long-term success of the business by managing it as a family-style operation, which attracted loyal customers. He also employed one of the first woman barbers in Madison.



The Sherman Plaza Hairstyling crew, from left to right: Ross Zanto, Shirly Glackin, Tim Roberts, and Curt Personke. The barbers have over 123 years of haircutting experience between them.

In 1968 Doug hired Ross Zanto who had also graduated from barber school in Chicago. Ross, who had lost his dad when he was young, soon came to regard Doug as a second father.

When Doug died in 1980 as a result of injuries suffered in an auto accident the year before, Ross bought the business and continued its family-style operation.

As a child, Doug's son Tim got his hair cut regularly at the barbershop. Heeding his father's wishes that he "use his brains, not his hands," he enrolled at the UW to attend the Business School. However, his father's

death was a profound shock and caused Tim to rethink what he really wanted to do with his life.

He soon realized he wanted to follow the family tradition and entered MATC for barber training. After graduating in 1982, Tim began working at the shop and a father-son relationship in turn developed between Ross and Tim.

In 1992, after being mentored by Ross, Tim took on ownership of the business and now leads a quartet of dedicated and consistent barbers including Ross as well as Shirly Glackin and Curt Personke.

All of the barbers have each owned

their own barbershops and between them have 123 years of haircutting experience.

The barbers enjoy the interaction they have had with customers over the years, including well known local personalities like Pat Richter and Chris Farley.

But Tim does remember a few trying moments, such as the time that a belligerent customer just out of jail refused to pay because he didn't like his haircut.

"He threatened to punch me out," recalls Tim, "even though I did exactly what he wanted and even worked right through my lunch hour."

Tim remains optimistic about the barbershop, which continues to offer traditional haircuts in a variety of styles at a reasonable price along with lots of lively conversation.

However he does occasionally wonder where he will find new employees if he needs them because students at barber/cosmetology schools are now being trained as stylists and have less interest in cutting short, tapered hair.

Nevertheless don't expect very much change at Sherman Plaza Hairstyling for the foreseeable future.

After all, as Tim pointed out, some of his current customers came to the shop as children with their parents 40 years ago and they're still coming in.

Photo by Lee Hayden



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