

St. Francis barber celebrates years of cutting hair

By Karen Krien

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St. Francis barber, Benny Weber, will be celebrating 50 years in the barbering business. He and three of his brothers have been barbers, but today, only he and his brother Ron are still in the business.

Being one of the younger brothers, Benny was introduced to the business in his brother's barbershop as a shoe shiner. At the time, he thought he could cut hair as good, if not better, than his brother.

Following his graduation from high school in Oakley, Mr. Weber went to Parks School of Denver where he learned how to repair cash registers. But, he decided he would still like to be a barber so he went to barber school in Wichita.

He graduated in 1957 but, in those days, it was necessary to work under a licensed barber. He worked in Atwood, Winona and Ulysses, then opened his own barbershop in Dighton.

He moved to St. Francis in 1963 and opened a shop. He well remembers the day he was getting ready to open as it was the day that President John Kennedy was killed.

At that time, there were five other barbers: Shorty Carrol, Sonny Angel, Rex Confer, Elmer Confer and Art Lueschen. For the last 20 years, Mr. Weber has been the only barber in St. Francis.

Besides cutting hair and shaving, Mr. Weber also sharpens clipper blades, knives, scissors and lawnmower blades, as well as repairing cordless razors.

No appointments needed

Mr. Weber has never made appointments. Customers would often wait and visit or tell jokes. Farmers coming to town, especially on Saturday nights in the 50s and 60s, would stop in when they came to town. If there were already customers waiting, they would take care of some of their business and then come back.

Even now, Mr. Weber doesn't take appointments.

"It's walk in only," he said.

He has gone to the rest home or made house calls to cut customer's hair. The longest trip he took was to Denver to cut Haddon Holzwarth's hair. Mr. Holzwarth was in the hospital and, while Mr. Weber went to visit his very good friend, he also took his barbering tools with him.

"I always cut Haddon's hair — he wouldn't let anyone else cut it," Mr. Weber said.

And, when Mr. Holzwarth died, Mr. Weber trimmed it one last time.

Famous customer

Mr. Weber said he cut Shea Hillenbrand's hair and figures Mr. Hillenbrand is the most famous person to have his hair cut at the shop. Mr. Hillenbrand, grandson of Albert and Bessie Burr, has

played baseball for the Boston Red Sox, Arizona Diamond Backs, Toronto Blue Jays and is now with the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Changes

Mr. Weber has seen a lot of changes in the last 50 years. One change which has been gone for many years is the fact that Bud Boardman came into the shop every other day where he had a shave with the straight-edge razor. Through the years, there have been many people who preferred this type of shave but when AIDS came onto the scene, the inspectors advised barbers to put away the straight edge as it was too dangerous to the barber as well as his/her customers.

Many men have used his hair tonic (Jeris) and some still use it today. Mr. Weber bought it by the gallon, which he used in the shop but also refilled the customer's bottle if he brought it back. When he first started a bottle of Jeris tonic cost about 50 cents but, today, it is \$5.

One little customer, Martin Beikman, wants only Mr. Weber to cut his hair so he can have the tonic — he says "he wants to smell good." One year, before the school Christmas program, Martin came specially to have Mr. Weber cut his hair so he would "look nice for the program," he said. His mom said he wouldn't let her touch it because she might mess it up.

Besides cutting hair, Mr. Weber used to give mudpacks. These were used to help get rid of acne. After the mudpack was applied, an ultra violet ray was used to dry it. When the mudpack was pulled off, the black heads came with it. When medicines came into use for acne, the mudpacks were seldom used.

One of the biggest changes in barbering came with styles. One of the more difficult styles to cut but one that Mr. Weber enjoyed working with was the flattop boogie. The hair was flat on top and the sides were combed back.

Mr. Weber said he had an excellent instructor, which helped him, but it was something he enjoyed doing.

When long hair became the style, Mr. Weber said it was bad for the barber. Often times, when the hair needed trimmed, the customer went to a beauty shop instead of to the barbershop.

Through the years, he cut hair for both boys and girls but, eventually, he cut girls' hair less and less.

First cuts

He gave many "first" haircuts but the cut for the youngest was for his very first granddaughter, who was born with long hair. Often kids would come in for a cut with their parents paying for it. They just wanted a "little" cut off. However, one time, a father came in and said, I'm paying for this



STILL CUTTING HAIR— Benny Weber gives Gary Leach a hair cut in his shop on Main Street.

Herald staff photo by Karen Krien

and I want the hair cut off! The kid came in and Mr. Weber told him what he said. Reluctantly, he had his haircut to suit his dad but Mr. Weber didn't like the job of telling him.

Mr. Weber enjoys his customers and always tries to make them smile at least once during the hair cut. If nothing worked, he would end the cut with "got ya looking pretty now!"

There was one kid who, after he heard those words, got up, looked in the mirror and said, "Yea, I know!"

Building history

Weber Barbershop's building has a long history of barbering. It was moved from Wano. In 1927, the business was known as the "Roberts Barbershop." Another building was attached to the rear and there were four chairs. Customers could also get a bath along with his haircut and shave.

Mr. Weber once had a tall barber pole on the front of the building. Every year at Halloween, he took it down and took it to the lot in the back of the building. Then, one year, someone stole it. Replacing would have been very costly so he eventually replaced it with a much smaller pole.

No retirement

Mr. Weber doesn't plan to retire. He likes what he is doing and can't imagine just sitting around.

He and his wife Kathy do anything but sit around when they are dancing. They love to polka and

Students attends college conference

North Central Kansas Technical College student, Levi Weeden, recently joined more than 90 students from 12 states to learn about cooperatives from experts across the country. Levi was a participant in the College Conference on Cooperatives, sponsored by the CHS Foundation and hosted by the National Farmers Union Foundation. The four-day event included participants from Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, Illinois, Texas, Vermont, North Dakota, Montana and Colorado.

"This is an opportunity for Farmers Union and the cooperative community of the Upper Midwest to teach young people about cooperative business principles and history, to introduce them to a wide variety of co-ops, and to show them that there are great careers in strong, ethical and community-minded businesses," said Roger Johnson, Union president.

To make cooperative education

come alive for the participants, students visited CHS headquarters, heard cooperative leaders, farmers, and government experts explain current challenges facing co-ops, and they also toured housing, retail and marketing cooperatives across the Twin Cities of Minneapolis/St. Paul.

Presenters included members, directors, employees and managers from traditional and value-added agricultural cooperatives, as well as perspectives from electric, housing, and worker-owned co-ops, as well as consumer cooperatives such as credit unions, REI and natural foods co-ops. Representatives from recently established cooperatives and the Peace Corps provided perspectives on cooperative development here and abroad.

To learn more, go to www.nfu.org.

Levi, a 2007 graduate of St. Francis Community High School, is the son of Rod and Cara Weeden, Elkhart.

Agency offers a free online news service

Farmer, ranchers and others in Kansas now have a more efficient, timely option for receiving important Farm Service Agency program requirements, deadlines and information.

"FSA is now offering free online communications through our GovDelivery electronic news service" said Adrian J. Polansky, Kansas Farm Service Agency executive director. "News will now be sent via e-mail — allowing you to receive immediate notification of program news that is pertinent to your agricultural operation."

The Farm Service Agency in Kansas will automatically subscribe farmers and ranchers to GovDelivery when they provide their email address to the local office. Farm Service Agency has already subscribed about 16,000 producers in Kansas to receive

news electronically through GovDelivery.

Grassroots organizations, agribusinesses, and others interested in receiving the information through e-mail can subscribe to GovDelivery online at www.fsa.usda.gov/subscribe.

"Unfortunately, the Farm Service Agency budget deficit affects the way we normally do business," said Mr. Polansky. "We no longer have funding to mail newsletters and other mass mailings. GovDelivery is a free electronic news delivery service that ensures Kansas farmers and ranchers remain informed of program changes, signups and deadlines."

Contact your local Farm Service Agency office if you have questions regarding GovDelivery electronic news service.

Upcoming Promotions

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