

50 years of haircuts

Written by SARAH McCRAW
Wednesday, 27 February 2013 18:13

After surviving the Beatles-inspired long-hair rage, it's been a satisfying career on the cutting edge for Saukville's barber

Gerald Guldán of Saukville has been a barber for so long that he remembers what the British music invasion did to his business.

"The Beatles probably had the biggest affect on me," Guldán said. "I opened up here in 1963 and they were big in what, 1964? A lot of kids, an awful lot of kids, let their hair grow for a long time, but I made it through and the kids with the long hair had to cut it off eventually."

Guldán, 77, has owned and operated Jerry's Barber Shop, 245 E. Green Bay Ave., in Saukville, for 50 years.

In a small room, Guldán has had thousands of customers sit in his big leather chair for a haircut or a shave.

Guldán, who grew up in Kewaskum, said he's not sure what led him to barber school.



"I was too lazy to work and too nervous to steal, so that narrowed the field down quite a bit," Guldán said with a chuckle.

At age 19, he attended Moler Barber College in Chicago, where he learned the skills of the trade.

Guldán completed an apprenticeship with a barber in West Bend before purchasing his own store in Campbellsport.

About a month later, he was called to serve in the Army Reserves during the Berlin crisis. Guldán sold his business for \$100 before leaving the state.

When he finished his tour of duty, Guldán picked up his clippers once again and opened up his shop in Saukville in March 1963.

In those days, a haircut cost \$1.25 and a shave was \$1.

Guldán would steam his customer's face with a warm towel and lather it with shaving cream

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before shaving with a straight razor.

“Some of my customers had such tough beards you had to steam them for twice as long before you could get at them,” he said.

Although he stopped offering shaves two years ago, Guldan’s razor strop still hangs from his barber chair. He’s had both since the business opened.

A large mirror hangs on the south wall of his shop and is flanked by shelves holding a variety of hair care products that have come and gone over the years.

“It used to be Brylcreem, Kreml and Southern Rose Hair Oil. Today, you’ve got all different sprays and gels. There are a million different products now compared to when I started,” he said.

Two medium-sized widows facing the street helped attract customers over the years, Guldan said.

“People could drive by and see if I was busy or not,” he said. “A lot of times, they’d see I was just walking around and they’d pull over and say, ‘Hey, can I get a cut?’”

“When I had people in here, it was always entertaining and, when I didn’t have anyone, I could always watch the scenery go by.”

Cutting hair has been a family business for Guldan and his wife Joanne, - who has operated a styling salon out of their home since 1976.

The couple said they have seen a variety of hair styles throughout the decades.

“I was really good at flat tops. My pride and joy was a good flat top. Now, boy, do they really get them short,” Mr. Guldan said.

While style trends affected Guldan’s business, so too has the economy.

“When things get a little tight, instead of getting their haircut every two or three weeks, they might get it every six weeks instead. So you notice when the economy’s a little tight,” Guldan said.

A small sign by the door now reads “Haircuts \$8.50, beard trims \$4.50,” prices Guldan said he hasn’t raised in awhile.

“He was always reasonably priced,” long-time customer William Parnitzke said. “I could get a good old fashioned clipping, just what I needed.”

Guldan said, “I’m not looking to get rich. I’m just happy to go to work and have something to do.”

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Operating what has been Saukville's only barber shop for decades has been rewarding for Guldán, who noted there's never been a lack of conversation with his clients.

"Every community has its characters, but I think Saukville had more than a lot of other communities, and they were my source of entertainment," he said. "In 50 years of this place, there probably hasn't been nothing that hasn't been discussed here.

"The thing I like most about it is I never mind coming to work. Just being with people on a one-on-one basis, I never felt like I had a job. I'd come down here and get entertained."

Guldán is taking some time off to recover from hip-replacement surgery, but said he would like to return to the shop this spring.

The real reward for Guldán always comes when he puts down his clippers and a customer reacts to his work for the first time.

"When they've really got long hair, they don't look at it, they run their hands through it to see how good it feels and say 'Oh man, that feels like the job I needed.'" he said.

"Every day I'd accomplish something down here. I've really enjoyed myself. It's been a lot of fun."