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The final cut

Local barber reluctantly closes shop after 56 years in Loveland

By Sarah Bultema

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

With one quick buzz at a time, little clumps of gray hair fell around Bob Desmond's feet.

His customer, Loveland's Bill Fleming, needed a haircut Wednesday — and he'd come to his longtime barber for the style he expects.

A comb in one hand and an electric razor in the other, Bob was meticulous as he sheared and shortened his customer's hair.

He gently swirled the 1920s barber chair to the left and right, surveying Fleming's head to make sure every hair was just so.

Sometimes the two joked. Other times they were silent. All the while, Bob peered down through his glasses at the customer's head of hair, his life's work.

It's a dance that Bob — a barber for more than half a century — has led thousands of times.

Yet while the moves were the same as they've always been, this cut was different.

It was the last haircut the barber would do from his shop of 45 years. Pending his doctor's recommendations, it might be the last cut of his career.

After 56 years of cutting hair in Loveland, Bob has turned his closed sign over for what could be the last time.

Faced with painful health issues in his hip and back, the 79-year-old barber has closed Bob's Barber Shop on Lincoln Avenue and is pausing his profession indefinitely.

"If I hadn't been hurting so bad, I could have shed some tears," Bob said. "One of the toughest things I've ever done is close this thing."

Yet while Bob has hung up his shears, many in the community will not soon forget the old-fashioned barber and his shop.

"People tell me they love coming here just for the fact of being in the shop and visiting with Bob," said his wife, Catherine. "It's the old-fashioned barbershop feeling."

Bob decided to become a barber after serving in the military. It was the profession his older brother had chosen, and Bob decided to follow suit.

He moved from Nebraska to Denver for barber school and soon opened Bob's Barber Shop on Loveland's Fourth Street.

While he changed his location once in the 56 years since, Bob's business has been operating pretty much the same through the half-century of work.

To start, the barber has never taken an appointment. Instead, customers stop by the shop when it's time

for their cut.

Bob, who arrived at work at 7:30 a.m., was never surprised to find four or five men lined up outside his business.

As he cut each one's hair, those waiting their turn took a seat on the red vinyl couch along the wall.

Then the conversations would erupt, shared with everyone in the room.

Among Bob's favorite topics were the University of Nebraska and its Huskers — a team he proudly honored with stickers, signs, pompoms and posters all around the shop.

And the barber relished rivalries, never shying from the chance to spar with a Rams or Buffaloes fan.

Yet he did it all with humor — which was one of the traits that endeared the barber to his customers.

Even at 79, Bob could keep the room in hysterics.

“The customer is always right,” he said, “until they go out the door.”

While he likes to kid, getting to know his customers was Bob's favorite part of the job, he said.

And through all the years, that never changed. In fact, only a few things have been altered in the shop since it opened.

The price of a cut rose from \$1.25 to \$9, and the barber had to shorten his hours from five days a week down to just three and a half.

“When I was younger, I could do it a lot faster,” Bob said. “When I got older, it takes a little longer.”

Recently, the decades of standing and working caught up with Bob. Last weekend, the barber decided he simply couldn't go on with his work.

By Wednesday, Bob, his wife and daughter Karen Hicks began packing up his shop. While Bob hopes to continue cutting hair in the future, the Desmonds are ending their lease on the shop.

They left a handwritten note on the door to let customers know the store was closed.

Working behind drawn blinds, Bob and his family could watch the feet of a steady stream of customers who paused in front of his door to read the notice before turning away.

“It's tearing me up,” Catherine said.

Yet one customer who lingered a little longer than the rest was invited inside.

Bob remembered Fleming right away, and he insisted on sitting the customer down in the chair for one final cut.

Fleming was thankful for the buzz from his favorite barber.

“He never rushes, no matter how many guys are in here. He takes his time, and we leave looking good,” Fleming said.

“You have to hunt for barbers like him.”

After using an electric razor and scissors to style Fleming's hair, Bob finished the cut with his old-fashioned straight razor — just as he always has.

After brushing away the loose hairs, the barber held up a mirror for his client to see the cut.

“It looks good, Bob,” Fleming said. “It looks really good.”

Bob smiled as he folded up his smock one last time.

“You’re more than welcome,” he said.

MORE: Bob and his family hope to hold an open house for the barber sometime in the next few weeks. Check the Reporter-Herald in the coming days for a date and time.

Jeff Stahla

Bob Desmond folds the cape used during the haircut on his final customer Wednesday at his shop on Lincoln Avenue in downtown Loveland. Desmond has been cutting hair in Loveland for 56 years, 45 of them at the same location.

JEFF STAHLA

Barber Bob Desmond and customer Bill Fleming are reflected in the mirror of Desmond’s shop in the 400 block of North Lincoln Avenue in downtown Loveland.

A razor blade sharpener from another era was part of the mementos and equipment packed up Wednesday at Bob Desmond’s barber shop in downtown Loveland.