

BUSINESS

Barbershop celebrates 80th anniversary

by Michal Ruprecht
March 12, 2019





Bob Dascola and his family have been in the barbershop business for 220 years. The family barbershop, Dascola Barbers, will celebrate its 80th anniversary in April. Dascola Barbers is located near Ben & Jerry's and Potbelly Sandwich Shop at 304 1/2 S. State St.

Dascola emphasized the importance of family in his business practice.

"This is a family business that we have," Dascola said. "It's not just one person. It's a whole family, and so this is what we're celebrating in April. Eighty years of a family business in Ann Arbor."

The shop at South State isn't the only location the family has owned. There have been a total of five different locations, including the current one. The first shop was opened by Dascola's father in 1939.

Dascola began his career in 1965 after he graduated from Detroit Greene's Barber College. Dascola said he worked in his father's barbershop throughout his education.

"I can tell you growing up in the business really made a big difference in how I viewed things," Dascola said. "One of the things that we've always prided ourselves on was having a family member in each one of our businesses to make sure that the people working there were doing good work, because when your name's on the front of the building, that is your reputation out there."

Dascola said the world of hair has changed since he first started in the business. He said his own hairstyle helped him get on the map and gain popularity.

“People would walk by and say, ‘Well, look, there’s a guy with a long hair cut. He must know what he’s doing,’ which sure put me on the map and I actually put two places out of business on South U because those guys didn’t have a clue about cutting long hair,” Dascola said.

For more than 50 years, Dascola has continued the family tradition. But he said it may end soon.

“There isn’t anybody coming behind me at this point in time,” he said. “My granddaughter was talking about becoming a hair person, but she’s still in high school, so it’s hard to say what’s going to happen at this point ... you can’t make your children or grandchildren do stuff they don’t want to do and if she decides not to do that, that’s okay. That’s her choice.”

Though none of his children aspire to become barbers, he said they help out at the shop in different ways. His youngest daughter used to clean his shop as a child, his oldest daughter helps out financially and his son has built him his website. Dascola said he’s proud of his kids because they find different ways to help him out.

Dascola said he has had to hire outside people to help out in the shop. He added it isn’t easy to find qualified people.

“Everybody has their own talents and finding people that are good with people and their skills with doing the haircutting is not the easiest thing in the world,” Dascola said. “It takes a combination of things: You have to have the right personality for this type of job ... and you have to have skills to be able to accomplish good hair cutting because if you can’t do the good haircutting, there’s no point in doing a good haircutting at all.”

Dascola is proud of his shop’s location in the heart of downtown Ann Arbor and the University of Michigan campus.

“At one point in time, when we were getting close to closing the original store, somebody tried to get me to move off of the campus, and I wouldn’t leave and I said, ‘I’m not leaving downtown,’” Dascola said. “I was born and raised downtown and I’m going to continue my whole career downtown. And the reason is, I love being around the University because I need the cultural and intellectual experience from my professor friends who love to teach outside the classroom. For the last 50 years, I’ve gotten a pretty good education.”

Dascola said his business has an impact on community and culture, which he said differentiates his business from others in Ann Arbor.

“I would say that when people come to my place, it’s more of a cultural and intellectual experience as opposed to the sports scene and all that business,” Dascola said. “I mean, I’m okay with football and stuff. I’m a really big hockey fan, but I don’t bring sports to my business. I bring cultural and intellectual things because I’m pursuing knowledge and I want to learn as many things as I can from people because we’re always teaching each other things.”

One of Dascola's long-time customers and University alum Chris Kushmaul said he's built a strong relationship with Dascola since 1993 when he first began going to his shop.

"He's far more than just a barber," Kushmaul said. "I mean, he's literally become a friend. He's like a father to me. And it's one barber visit at a time. We've just built a relationship."

When customers sit down to get a haircut, they face a mirror filled with pictures of his clients. Some pictures showcase customers from birth to old age.

"I call it my happy mirror," Dascola said. "Every day when I walk in there, and I turn the light on the back counter and I hang up my fanny pack, the first thing I see is all those smiling faces looking at me and so it's like welcoming me back to work."

LSA junior Eric Donarski said he is very excited for the shop's 80th anniversary and added he feels at home whenever he gets a haircut there.

"Not only is he excellent at cutting hair, but Bob has a breadth of knowledge to keep anybody entertained and barely focused on their haircut," Donarski wrote in an email interview. "Dascola Barbers has become a place that feels like home to me and I'm sure it will for anybody who schedules an appointment."

In two years, his lease will expire, and Dascola doesn't know if he will renew it because of his age. However, despite the uncertainty, Dascola said his job is unlike any other because he gets instant gratification from what he does.

"This is my passion," Dascola said. "And my whole life of doing what I do. And I chose that a long time ago. And I stuck with my decision through thick and thin and it's been a rewarding career."