



Duane Butler cuts Nels Rittenburg's hair. Rittenburg has been a frequent customer of Butler for years.

Family tradition may come to end for barbershop

By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

The red-and-white-striped barbershop pole at the entrance to the Butler Barber Shop marks a page in history, a time when haircuts were 25 cents and the entertainment was free.

For 100 years, the Butler family has been a part of numerous pages of history from the corner of 48th and St. Paul streets in Lincoln's historic University Place.

Three generations of Butlers have held the scissors. A neon sign in the front window, a modern contrast to the shop's antiquity, marks the era of the latest Butler, Duane.

Duane spent much of his childhood at the corner barbershop but didn't intend to become a barber. He began doing drafting work but got laid off—and a better opportunity.

"I started barber school," he says. "I liked it. I stayed, and 45 years later I'm still here."

One of Duane's customers, Tolliver Delbert, chuckles.

"If he kept up that much time as a senator in Congress, he'd be worth millions," he says, laughing.

Most of Duane's customers are regulars, and some have been coming to Butler's since Duane's father ran the shop.

The conversation between Duane and his customers turns to local politics and golf. Not much has changed there.

But the changes in the popularity of television and radio reflect changes the shop has seen since its early days.

"We didn't have O.J. Simpson then," Duane says. "There was more talk on the local level back then."

Years ago, the barbershop used to be the city's hub of entertainment.

"On a Saturday night, men would come into the barbershop to get their hair cut before they went out," he says, "and some would bring guitars and others would start singing."

"There was this one fellow with a booming bass voice. They'd get his ear, and they'd go from there. We used to have the original barbershop quartets."

Duane's customers now listen to big-band music.

Those customers soon may have to change their tune and find another barber. A "For Sale" sign sits in the window, signaling the last generation of the Butler Barber Shop.

Duane says he is ready to retire, and his son Rex, who graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a degree in mechanical engineering, isn't taking over the business. Duane says he isn't upset, as he has many hobbies to keep him busy.

Customers tried to talk him out of it, but Duane stood firm.

"They've either retired or died," he said, chuckling. "I just haven't died yet, that's all."



The Butler family has cleaned hair off the floor 100 years.

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DUANE BUTLER

Barber shop owner

Photos by
Jay Calderon



Butler bicycles to and from work nearly every day.