

# Barber has given many first haircuts in 22 years

By Sam Bari

As Ken Silvia, master barber and proprietor of Ken's Barber Shop on Conanicus Avenue, draped a barber's cape over a customer and cut his hair, he reminisced about the old days when he started in the business.

When the customer realized that Silvia was being interviewed, he said, "Hey, he gave me my first haircut." The customer was Jason Head, 32, a Newport police officer who grew up in Jamestown and moved to Coventry when he got married.

Adam, Silvia's son and partner, smiled as he cut a customer's hair in the next chair. "Dad gave a lot of people in town their first haircut," Adam said. "More than a few guys have never had their hair cut by anyone else."

Ken's Barber Shop has been a Jamestown institution for over four decades, although not always at the prestigious location on Conanicus Avenue where it is now. The shop is located on a prime parcel of Jamestown real estate.

Silvia lives above the shop with his wife, Peggy. They have been married since 1969 and have two sons. Adam, the barber, and Judd, who is a special education teacher, works in Wickford and lives in Jamestown with his family. Both men grew up on the island.

A haircut at Ken's Barber Shop could very well be the best deal in town. Customers can get a haircut and a spectacular view of the sailboats hanging on their moorings at East Ferry. In the summertime, towards the end of July, patrons sitting in the chairs in front of the shop while waiting for their turn inside can hear jazz from across the bay at the Newport Jazz Festival.

And that's what Ken's Barber



Adam Silvia, left, Newport Police Officer Jason Head, in chair, and Ken Silvia pose photograph at Ken's Barber Shop on Conanicus Avenue.

Photo by Sam Bari

Shop is all about, a great place for a good haircut at a decent price, one of the best views on the island, and good jazz from across the bay or from Adam's iPod stereo system.

"Adam brought the shop into the twenty-first century," Silvia said. "When he graduated from barber college and came to work here, he brought a television, a real cash register, and a stereo system. Now it's a state-of-the-art place to work."

Silvia is semi-retired and now only works at the shop on Fridays and Saturdays. His longtime customers are also his friends, and they come in on those days to get their haircut and pay their respects to Ken. Adam handles the shop on his own during the rest of the week.

Silvia says that he bought the present shop 22 years ago so that he and his wife could have a pleasant view from their home above the shop. "It just happened to work

out for the customers too," he said. "We've seen a lot happen since we've been here."

He told the story about when he first opened the new shop. Silvia kept a fishing pole in the corner because he could grab it and walk across the street and fish off the pier when business was slow.

One day a customer was waiting for his turn in the chair when a guy burst through the door and announced, "The bluefish are running."

Silvia said that the customer grabbed the fishing pole from the corner and ran out of the shop. He returned the pole later that afternoon after catching a few bluefish and Ken cut his hair. "I don't remember if I ever cut the guy's hair again," Silvia said.

Ken's Barber Shop had humble beginnings. He bought the shop where he worked in the Hunt Block when he was 19-years old. He was there for 14 years. Then he rented a shop where Trattoria Simpatico is now for five years before purchasing his current location.

"When I first started, haircuts were \$1.50. Gas was also way under a dollar a gallon." Now, most people say that the location and the ambience at Ken and Adam's Barber Shop are worth the \$12 price tag. And, a great haircut is included.

Ken's shop is open Tuesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. On Saturday the shop is open from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. but Ken only cuts hair on Friday and Saturday.

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