

# The Community Page

## 50 Years of the Rio Barbershop

Barbering wasn't even on Ed Kearsley's radar screen when he graduated from high school in Victor, Idaho. He was serious about selecting a future occupation and wanted to find a career that would help him sustain a family, but he was struggling with the decision. He was trying to decide between college and a vocational education when his father suggested he follow the example of his uncle, a highly successful barber in Victor. Although not completely sold on the idea, Ed did realize that with a six-month training period, he would be left with a skill that would earn him money to pay for whatever education he finally selected.

Trouble was, by the time he had finished barber college and completed his apprenticeship eighteen months later, he found he enjoyed the work so much that he determined to stay. That was 50 years ago this year, and you will find him today in the same place where he began, The Rio Barber Shop at 269 West Broadway next to the closed Rio Theater from whence the shop got its name.

The first significant challenge to his choice came early with the long hairstyles of the '60s. All barbers began to see their clientele numbers decline, and it was a time of weeding. Ed remembers a day when, at \$1.50 per cut, he had just two customers come in all day, and the realization that he had taken in only \$3 for a whole day was "very humbling." Ed met the challenge by expanding his skills. He spent evenings and weekends back at school learning about hair styling, thereby broadening his appeal and maintaining a strong following.



Ed Kearsley buzzes Justin Mason's hair Friday morning. Ed started his career in this same shop 50 years ago.

Ed's determination to please his customers is genuine, and it is immediately apparent that barbering is just a sideline; he is actually in the business of making friends, and he loves it. Each day he is "glad to come to work." Ed's main goal, other than giving a great haircut, is to make people laugh, to lighten their day, and to help them feel better than before they came into the shop.

The focus of his work is service to his community, and it shows in his devotion to a years-long client who now can no longer leave his home. Ed goes there to cut his hair—and to visit and make him smile.

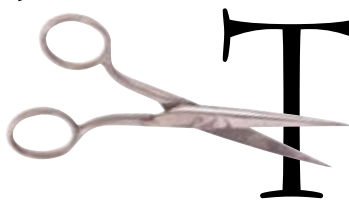
This loyalty was apparent when Gary Gernant, local teacher and former coach, came into the shop. Not a word was exchanged about what was wanted, Ed simply began to work. Conversa-

tion was flowing, but not about how long, how short, or what to do with the beard. This mystery was solved when it was announced that Gary has been a customer of 23 years. There are many, many others as well. Gary says it can be summed up in two words: "Comfort and trust." He feels at home with a friend whose work is always on target.

"Ed cares about his business and his customers," says Ben Gisin who came in for a haircut Friday morning. "And I don't have to listen to crazy rock music while I get my hair cut here."

This little, simple shop, on perhaps one of the busiest streets in town, with not one parking place anywhere in sight, still endures and flourishes fifty years later. Customers keep coming to Ed Kearsley for news, humor, and oh, a great haircut.

## A Short History of Barbering



The word "barber" is derived from the Latin word, "barba" which means beard. In early history, the barber was one of the most important men in superstitious tribes who believed that evil spirits entered through the hairs of the head, thus the necessity of hair cutting. Even today, those who cut and dress hair are invaluable members of the community in countries around the world.

Styles have changed from shaved heads to long hair and beards throughout history. Beards eventually became a detriment in the days of Alexander the Great when men could be dragged and thrown to the ground by their beards (the easier to spear them). Shaving obviously became popular very fast.

The early Christian era remained fertile ground for barbers, with shaved heads and faces in style, but Charlemagne brought long flowing hair back into fashion. Solving this up-and-down fashion change was the intervention of barbers being called upon to assist monks and priests who had become the physicians of the dark ages. There were no professional surgeons at that time, and as the most popular choice of treatment for most ills was bloodletting, barbers became the clergy's assistants for this work.

As it was eventually deemed inappropriate for the clergy to deal with blood, barbers gained ever more importance when the era of barber-surgeons began. They also handled dental problems as well. This prestige lasted until the middle of the 18th century when the science of medicine began its advancement, and the barbers could not keep up, eventually becoming wigmakers while wigs were in fashion. Barbershops declined in respectability until A.B. Moler opened the first school for barbers in 1893 in Chicago. This institution's success led to greater prestige and skill for the profession where it remains to this day.

### The Origin of the Barber Pole

When bloodletting was a primary occupation of barbers, they used long, linen bandages, twisted around the arm, one to stop the bleeding, and another to wind around the arm after the bleeding ceased. When these bandages were not in use, they were wound around a pole to be at hand, and were hung at the door as a sign of the profession, and that the barber was available. Later, for convenience, a painted sign replaced the original pole and was given a permanent place outside the shop. This was the beginning of the modern barber pole.



Ed Kearsley's  
**RIO BARBER SHOP**  
269 W. Broadway  
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