

The Black River JOURNAL

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WANTED: ONE GOOD BARBER

After Nearly 70 years, a Peapack - Gladstone Tradition May Be Coming to the End of an Era

By Ruth Hill Thomson

"Peapack and Gladstone are two of the neatest and most pleasant villages in the state, both towns are growing rapidly" (From a newspaper article dated May 15, 1903)

One hundred years later, the Borough of Peapack and Gladstone has grown some, but not too much. It is still a unique village with hometown traditions.

Still, there have been changes. At one time there were four barbers in town, now there is only one and his legacy is in question.

Joseph Telesco, our village's last barber, has decided to retire to Florida this fall with his wife Jessie. It was a hard decision but much of Joe's family is now living in Florida, and he wants to be closer to his children and grandchildren.

This decision is not an isolated fact



Above: The Telesco Barber Shop and Beauty Salon in Peapack has been a tradition since 1934. Bottom left: Joe Telesco gives regular customer and Weichert realtor, John Cushing a trim.



of life, however - it is the end of an era for the Telesco family and could be the end of an era in Peapack and Gladstone.

Joe's father, William Telesco, came to the United States as a teenager and apprenticed as a barber in Newark. In 1934, he came out to Peapack and bought a building for his barbershop that also housed a candy store and gas station. As the family grew, (six children who all attended local schools), Mr. Telesco bought a house and property at 95 Main Street. After some alterations, he opened up a barbershop and a beauty salon with his residence in back. William's son Vito and his daughter Fannie ran the beauty salon

while he ran the barbershop.

Joe wasn't sure he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps although he attended Barber school in New York and worked with his father for a while after graduating from Bernard's High School.

To satisfy his questions about what career to follow, he enlisted in the Army in 1962 and was sent to Germany as a finance and travel clerk with the Eighth Infantry Division. A few days before his discharge, his life changed dramatically. He was riding in a Volkswagen with some friends when a drunk driver slammed into them. When rescuers arrived at the scene they found Joe's friends, who had been thrown from the car, but didn't see Joe. Then one of them saw a pair of legs jutting out from under the car's flaming chassis - it was Joe. By the time he was pulled out he had suffered second and third degree burns over his upper arms, torso and head. Joe endured skin grafts and lost his hair as a result of his burns. He has had to wear a hairpiece ever since, which he considers rather ironic for a barber. After a long recovery in Germany and at Walter Reed Army Medical center in Washington, DC, he finally came home to Peapack. (Joe will always be grateful to representative, Peter Frelinghuysen, who helped him so much after his traumatic experience and who helped him get a financial settlement from the Army to cover his extensive medical expenses.)

When Joe returned home, his father's barbershop became a "secure place of recovery". He started cutting hair in 1965 and has been doing it ever since. In 1968, he was "fortunate" to be introduced to a young nanny from Edinburgh, Scotland, named Jessie Bradshaw. They were married in 1968 and were blessed with a son and daughter, who now have families of their own.

Barbering has been very rewarding for Joe. The Telesco's often sponsored "Hair-Cut-A-Thons" for the benefit of

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Matheny School and the Peapack - Gladstone First Aid Squad. I'm grateful to Joe for always helping my sons into the barber chair, as well as my Jim, who suffered from Parkinson's disease. People like Joe and his family make living in a small town extra special.

Joe's father and sister Fannie are deceased, Vito has already retired and now Joe is closing up shop. The "regulars" will miss coming in for their haircuts and sharing news, sports scores, family news and the talk of the town. Joe would really like to find a replacement for all his faithful customers but it's difficult these days - as Joe says, "Shave and haircut barbers are a dying breed".

Good Luck Joe - we'll miss you!

Joe is looking for a good barber to take his place. If you always dreamt of opening up a traditional barbershop in a small town, this is the perfect chance to become part of a great community! For more information, contact Joe Tesesco at (908) 234-1971.



(Lee Wolfe)



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