

Haircuts with a purpose: Rob's Barbershop Foundation

By Cari Holmes

Robert "Rob" Cradle owned and operated a thriving barbershop in Odenton, Maryland for over 10 years. In 2001, Cradle had an idea that would prove to be life changing. He collected funds from customers to pay one of his barbers to provide free haircuts and other grooming services to Sarah's House, a nearby homeless shelter only a quarter mile away from his shop.

The reaction from both the customers and the shelter were overwhelming. "The customers loved it, of course the shelter loved it and my barbers got to work even when business was slow."

The creation of "Rob's Barbershop Community Foundation" followed shortly. The foundation is a non-profit developed to provide grooming services to residential shelters.

In 2003, Cradle took on the foundation as a full-time commitment and sold his barbershop. "It was a



Robert Cradle (left) receives a \$1500 from the Safeway Foundation for the Rob's Barbershop Community Foundation. The funds will assist with the operation of salons in three residential shelters— Lighthouse Shelter, Helping Up Mission and Kari's Home.

Courtesy Photo

win-win situation," said Cradle.

Starting with one permanent barbershop installment, Cradle now has locations in residential shelters in both Anne Arundel County and Baltimore City area. Cradle says, "It is not just giving haircuts, but giving

something practical."

One practical thing is that haircuts provide opportunities for employment. Since appearance can be a barrier when applying for a job, a good haircut would provide an extra boost in confidence for residents of the shelters attempting to re-enter the workforce.

Unlike the sporadic charity days area barbershops host throughout the year, foundation barbershops are permanent which Cradle says is more beneficial to the residents. "Having consistent and regular grooming will boost their [self] esteem."

Cradle says the "beauty" of having the permanent installment is that the residents get to hangout in the shop as a respite. In the case of Helping Up Mission residential shelter in Baltimore, residents work in the barbershop as a part of their training.

Cradle hires professional bar-

bers and stylists to operate the locations. Occasionally, he still gets a chance to personally give haircuts. While Cradle is not always hands on in the actual day-to-day running of all the locations, he regularly visits each installment to insure the locations are being maintained properly.

The most recent location is an installment at Franklin Square Elementary School. "When I saw that they had the space and population I thought this was a perfect place." Cradle said that because the location is a Title I school—92 percent of the students receive or qualify for free lunch—he encouraged the school administrators to apply for program.

"We have had kids that have lived in homes that had no electricity and running water. So, of course, the opportunity to be groomed on a regular basis was a big plus for them," Cradle said of the students

he works with. The school administration selects the students to participate in the program and by the end of the school year the barbershop services about 40 students.

Cradle says despite economic hardship throughout the country the foundation has always moved forward with steady growth until this year. According to him, both large and small donors have been unable to renew their previous commitments. Which is why the Safeway Foundation grant of \$1500 the foundation recently received is so significant.

"Safeway employees are proud to be able to support local organizations like this that touch the lives of our customers," said Gregory TenEyck, chairman of the Safeway Foundation for the Eastern Division.

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