



Woody's world

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Bill Coretery grew up in Burdette Wood's barber chair.

He was only three when Wood cut his hair for the first time. Now, he's 66, and still trusts his hair to the barber everybody calls - what else? - Woody.

Woody, who turns 87 in June, has been cutting hair in his tiny, one-chair shop on Morse Street in Cedar Lake since Aug. 1, 1930, and he says he's going to keep going as long as he can.

He stops shaving a customer and puts down his straight razor, holding his hands out, palms down, challenging anyone to find even a hint of a quiver.

There's not a tremble, he says with some pride, in these hands. "I've got good eyesight, a steady hand and good legs," he said, and no plans to retire.

After all, he survived the 1960s when it seemed no one cut their hair at all and the Depression when haircuts for 40 cents were deemed by many to be too costly.

"It got so bad, we got to cutting hair for a quarter," Woody says. "But that's when quarters were made out of silver."

He says he's aiming for at least another two years in the business, which will make a nice, round 65

"It'd drive me crazy if I just sat here and watched TV," he says. "I feel good when I'm working. I roller skated until I was 73, but I wouldn't want to try that now."

Coretery is the customer who has been with him the longest. "His dad was a street car conductor in Chicago," said Woody. "I cut his hair when he was three. He's 66 now, and I'm still cutting his hair. That's a long time."

Woody's hours are restricted now. You know he's open if his car is out front, and don't bother phoning first - the shop doesn't have one. But he still takes new customers "if they just want regular haircuts. I just give regular haircuts, I don't style hair."

The small frame shop has been moved three times, and landed on its present location in 1955 on property Wood owns.

The interior is tiny but not cramped, and it's decorated in Early Tonsorial - hair style posters where all the cuts look like Ward Cleaver's and a barber college business card with the address of Chicago 6, Illinois.

Postal zones haven't been used since 1963 - this is serious clutter here.

About the only thing missing for immediate induction into the Barber Shop Hall of Fame is a game fish stuffed and mounted on the wall.

It's cluttered, but clean, and there are stickers everywhere from places Woody has visited. He took a steam train ride through the Pacific Northwest last year, and he liked it so much he went back a second time.

It wasn't all scissors and clips for Woody, who was born in the crossroads hamlet of Creston, between Cedar Lake and Lowell. He left there in 1921, headed for the north woods of Wisconsin and a job in the timber industry.

He quit that in 1923 and returned to the Chicago area, where he kicked around, working on the railroad, on farms and on road construction before landing a job in an Aurora, Ill. factory fabricating sheet metal.

It was there, after an operation left him unable to continue the sheet metal work, that his barber talked him into going to barber college in Chicago. He got his degree on Jan. 17, 1930, and hasn't looked back.

Less than two months after opening his Cedar Lake shop, he married the girl he first took to see Al Jolson in the first talking picture.

He took time out for World War II when "people started pointing fingers at

me and telling me to get a war job."

He joined the Army and ended up fighting in Europe, he said, and returned to Indiana where he cut hair and took up flying in his \$750 Veronica Champ airplane as a hobby.

Although his wife died in 1980, Wood's two daughters still live in the area.

He lives in Crown Point, near the high school, and drives to work mornings, Tuesday through Saturday.

"I like it the way it is now," he said of his job. "I worked hard, put in a lot of hours. But I like the job, and I like the people.

"I don't know where the 63 years have gone, but that's how long I've been here, 63 years."