

CLEAN CUT ...

Barber offers wholesome environment for 50 years

By Erin C. Perkins

A lot of things have changed since John King first started operating Main Street's Barber Shop in downtown Pilot Mountain in 1959.

His haircuts are no longer \$1. They are now \$8. A bottle of tonic is \$20 instead of \$1.50.

But one thing hasn't changed – the way he chooses to run his business.

He is still open Monday through Saturday. There is no profanity allowed in King's shop. And he still refuses to cut the hair of men who want to wear it below the ear.

King said ever since the influence of the 1960s rock band, the Beatles, led some local male teenagers to grow longer hair, he has refused to cut any men's hair unless they wear it above their ears.

"It's not appropriate for a man to have long hair," said King, who noted 1 Corinthians 11:14 in the Bible, which reads "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?"

"Those kids jumped on that hairstyle like a dog on a ball," the 82-year-old recalled. "I wouldn't cut it. I knew (the hairstyle) was just a way to defy their parents."

It's a strong conviction that King says lost him some clients at first, but never ruined his 50-year-old business.

In fact, King continues to have returning and long-time customers who appreciate his clean cut ways.

"John is a faithful barber and I've always enjoyed going to him all these years," said J.W. Denny, a long-time customer of King who has visited him since he opened almost 50 years ago. "He didn't allow any swearing or smoking in his shop, which some customers didn't like, but he always had a good clean crowd there."

Denny added that the Pilot Mountain Main Street barber shop offers that small-town charm and wholesomeness that it's neighboring city, Mount Airy--said to be the inspiration for Maberry--is known for.

King said he remembered in the 1960s when neighboring merchants protested against preachers who stood on the sidewalks and preached to by passers. Believing it was spoiling their business, they requested an ordinance to ban them from doing so.

In disagreement with those merchants, King said he decided to gather the signatures of other merchants who felt as he did about the preaching.

"As much bad stuff as I have seen happen outside that



window," said King, as he pointed his finger to the front of his shop. "Those people needed to hear some good preaching."

Traveling to the stores downtown and in nearby neighborhoods, he collected dozens of signatures. He took his petition to town hall the night of the ordinance ruling and requested its refusal.

"The petition saved that ordinance from being passed," he said. "It's just not safe to go against the Bible."

King's wife, Josephine, described her husband as a friendly and faithful man who stands behind his con-



victions. She said that trait has made his customers return year after year.

Snug between a line of shops on Main Street including the 52-year-old Sandwich Shop--or the Squeeze Box, as locals refer to it--the barber shop is one of two remaining barber shops that still exist in Pilot Mountain.

"John's shop is a convenient place to give the local men a haircut," said his wife, who attributes the longevity of his business to his personable nature, familiarity and even lack of competition. "There were three shops, but now there's only two. People have to travel outside of Pilot for a haircut, we just hope as time goes on people don't want to go to one of those shopping malls for hair cuts."

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But time has gone on, yet it hasn't shifted business any for the Kings.

"I've never had to ask to borrow money," said King, who now raises three of his seven grandchildren. "We just always had enough to get by."

Five generations and three adult children later, King said he hopes his barber shop will continue as his family's legacy.

His youngest son, who works full-time in Winston-Salem, puts in 15 hours a week in the barber shop, often taking clients by appointments only. King said he hopes to one day leave the business to his sons and daughters, with his youngest son operating the shop.

"My son has the capability and the outgoing personality to be a good barber," he said.

But until that day of inheritance, King said he'll continue to enjoy the "friendly town" that always took him at face value.

"I look forward not only to their business, but their friendship," he smiled. "The enjoyment of their visits keeps a bright smile on my face."

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