

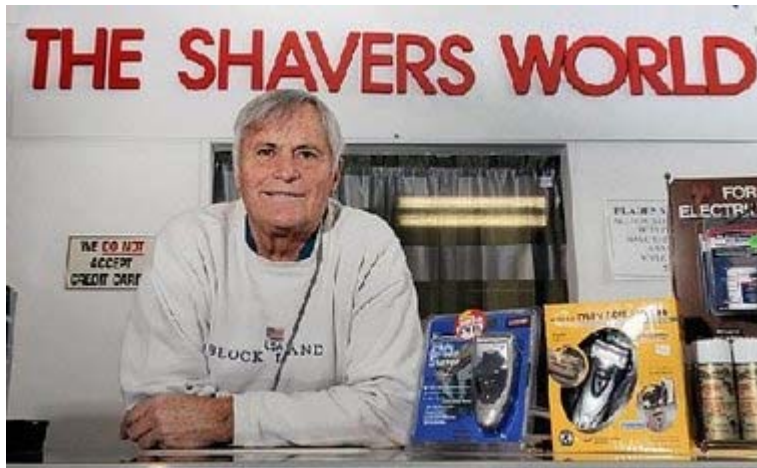
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Syracuse downtown shaver shop hangs on by a hair

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By



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Frank Ordonez/The Post-Standard

Bill Truesdale, owner of The Shavers World, has been in business in downtown Syracuse for 51 years.

Thursday, I wrote a favorable report about the future of downtown. Today, I'll try on a different view ...

I visited Bill Truesdale in The Shavers World shop, at 208 E. Jefferson St., one afternoon last week. Bill has been in business downtown 51 years.

He's seen better times, Bill has. The little store — just two rooms a bit west of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception — is very quiet the last three or four months. Bill's store services and sells electric shavers. These days, his trade is mostly in repairs but hardly what it was when he came to Syracuse from his native Rhode Island, back in

1961.

"What a city it was," Bill's recollecting in his back workroom among shaver parts in spades. "Downtown was a very lively place, with department stores, theaters, shoppers ..."

His voice trails away.

Downtown, despite many promises, is not a lively place to be these days. Warren Street has a sad look to it. Retailing is tough for Bill and his small-business neighbors, including Edward's Expert Tailor shop across Jefferson Street and Ralph Rotella's Discount Shoe Repair in the University Block on East Washington Street. Ralph has been in business 35 years.

"We're hanging in there, barely," Bill says with a shrug.

He came to our town and settled in after going to work for Schick, the electric razor company, right out of high school. Schick moved him to Syracuse to run its store here.

The company folded in 1974 and sold the business to Bill. His shop was in the Hills Building, across from The Post-Standard offices then. I recall visiting the store on an errand from a Post editor with a vicious five o'clock shadow.

Bill's a lanky 6 feet 1½ inches with a boyish shock of gray hair.

Yes, he shaves with an electric.

His next stop on a downtown odyssey was the basement of Dey Bros. department store, off of South Warren Street, when Dey's was one of four department stores in the central business district.

"It was a good spot," Bill explains. "I got an offer I couldn't refuse."

When Dey's closed in the 1990s, Bill moved his store to the Jefferson Building, where he remains today, although not in his original spot. He was 20 years at No. 202, until the business at the corner asked the landlord to expand. Now he's moved to No. 208 E. Jefferson.

Bill endured a few indignities when Eli Hadad owned his building, along with 14 other properties. Back in 2006, Eli forgot to pay National Grid's bill and Bill went two months without power — sometimes working in the dark with the front door open because the air conditioning was shut down. There's a new landlord now, according to Bill, and he's OK.

Our man doesn't see any benefit from some of the changes downtown, mostly from the trend toward downtown living.

"I don't see people from the new Dey's Plaza," he said of his neighbor, which has been converted to a place to live. "I thought business would pick up, but it hasn't. I see the same people walking by all the time."

Bill thinks his trade was hurt by shaver owners shopping the Internet for parts and the lack of referrals, which he used to get from the makers.

"When I called to complain," he said, "I was told they were referring people to the yellow pages listing 'appliances, small'; I'm listed under 'shavers, electric.'"

Bill, who is 75, thinks he'll hold out another two years before he closes what seems to be the only shaver shop between Binghamton and the Canadian border.

What would he do in retirement, anyway? He's sold the 18-foot boat he used to fish from — bass were a specialty catch. Years ago, he played semipro basketball with teams such as the Pawtucket, R.I., Hobos and town and Boys Club teams locally. He's got a bad back.

He does follow the Syracuse University men's basketball team, though.

"They have a great team," Bill explains. "If they'd only learn how to rebound."

Jim's idea

Jim Hyla, of DeWitt, sent me an email reacting to Thursday's column about downtown. He has an idea about marking old buildings:

"Why not have plaques on the outside of the buildings detailing their history? People walking by could stop and read them, and those of us old enough could remember. It would provide a walking history tour.

"Certainly, companies investing thousands to millions could afford it. It would have some value added to the buildings as well. I suspect that some of the people moving downtown are doing so because of the wonderful architecture and its history. ...

"It seems the Onondaga Historical (Association) could put the history of the building together, and it could become a requirement for getting a permit."

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