



## LEFT OF CENTER

BY JOSHUA MALONI

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# New style of haircutting at J-Cruz Barbershop



Will Cruz is shown working inside the J-Cruz Barbershop at 748 Center St., Lewiston.

Everyone, from time to time, doubts their abilities.

Will Cruz, when he started to have those feelings, did what, well, not many would do.

He opened a new business.

In a different county.

During a pandemic.

"Jesse (Printup), my business partner, he's a good friend of mine. There was a time period that I actually stopped believing in myself," Cruz recalled. Though he had cut hair for two decades – since he was a teenager – he thought maybe it was time to leave the barbershop. "It got to the moment that, I'm like, I just didn't want to do this anymore. You know, more so personal reasons. And you know, because of him and my girlfriend, they kept motivating – like, 'Hey, you're really good at this. Why would you want to quit? And pretty much because of their motivational words and them always pushing me – 'You got this; you can do this' – it pretty much uplifted me again. Made me believe in myself again. 'Hey, I can do this.'"

Cruz, 36, took that newfound confidence to 748 Center St., in Lewiston, where he opened J-Cruz Barbershop at the end of the summer. He and Printup completely transformed what was most recently the Village Goldsmith into a spot that feels like a place one would get a haircut.

"Absolutely," Cruz said. "Everybody who comes in here – I mean,

obviously many of the people that do come in here are from the area, so they know what establishment was here before – so they know how it looked before. And to the way how it looks nowadays, it's like a complete 360. They come in here and they love what I've done with the place. It feels comfortable. They say it feels homey. They say it feels like a barbershop should feel – you know, quiet."

That wasn't the case at Goodfellas Barber Studio in Buffalo, where Cruz honed his craft.

"I come from barbershops that are loud. We're working anywhere from ranging from four to

eight, 10 barbers in one location," he said. "Just me being here by myself makes it more, in the sense of, 'Hey, I've got to make this feel more homey; more comfortable for the customers; instead of, you know, 'Hey, I got loud music playing,' and 'I don't think I should go in there.'"

"That's one thing I've experienced in life that – especially in this area that I've noticed – I've got to make you feel comfortable. This is not Buffalo; this is not the west side. This is a completely different neighborhood – really a different world over here. And I got to give what the people want."

In that respect, it's been so far, so good. Customers have commented favorably about the pricing – which is less than larger hair studios in the county – as well as the unique method Cruz employs.

"Here in this area ... what I've been told is that there's not too many people ... that actually get straight razor. Straight razor haircuts," he said. "It's more mainly in this area just scissor cuts. I'm pretty much just bringing my style. I specialize in all styles of

haircut, but mainly in straight razor. I think that's the main thing in this area that makes everything different – as for my barber shop, that I could bring to the people out here."

For those who don't know the difference – and this writer didn't – Cruz explained, "Scissors is mainly for touching up the edges." The razor, he said, "It defines your haircut better. It brings it out."

Having remodeled his Center Street barbershop – and now starting to make a name for himself – Cruz is just waiting for COVID-19 restrictions to ease up. He has plans to offer shampooing and hot towel treatment when permitted by the state.

J-Cruz Barbershop is open from noon to 6 p.m. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday; from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursday and Friday; and noon to 4 p.m. Saturday.

"I prefer appointments, just to have a peace of mind for everybody," Cruz said. "If your appointment's at 12, best believe that you will be sitting in the chair by 12. There's no confusion of 'Oh, well, hey, I've been here waiting for a while. I thought I was next.'"

Call 405-9595 to make an appointment.

Running a business, as the coronavirus continues to hinder all aspects of society, "Man, you know it's hard; it really is. Because this is actually my first business I've owned," Cruz said. "I've ran a lot of barber shops before, for buddies of mine, or manage a lot of them – when there was no pandemic. And it's like I could actually see how business is, really."

"It's sad; it's hard; but I'm focused. I'm focused and motivated to keep moving. You know, it's temporary. This pandemic thing is temporary, so just got to maintain focus."

That said, "This pandemic has not only been a curse, but it also has been a blessing," Cruz said. "I would have never thought in a million years that I would own a barbershop, in Western New York alone, during a pandemic. But, you know, every day I count my blessings. Even if I have a day that I come in and I'm here for eight-10 hours, and nothing happens, well, guess what? I was here. You know, I met a couple people walking by. It's always a blessing."

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## HAL traverses 'Nostrils of Hell'

The Historical Association of Lewiston's October program is titled, "Early Days of Buffalo, Nostrils of Hell." Michael Vogel will present this event at 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 22, in the Red Brick Municipal Building gym, 145 N. Fourth St.

Buffalo's waterfront has a rich and colorful history, and no place on the shoreline quite matches the legendary Canal District – the spot where the Erie Canal met the Great Lakes.

The transshipment port at the foot of Buffalo's Main Street built the city into one of the largest and most prosperous in the nation by 1900, and it developed worldwide

notoriety as one of the roughest waterfronts anywhere (and a red-light district most of Buffalo called "the infected district" or, as a Christian group termed it, "the very nostrils of hell"). Not only were companies such as Wells Fargo and American Express founded on those docks as the port generated immense wealth here, but lakes sailors and canawlers – who didn't like each other very much – also found places and ways to spend their money on less lofty pursuits.

"America's Crossroads," listed by one Western New York review website as one of the 10 best books on local history, tells the story of the river of immigrants who flowed through this port to settle the heartlands, and the river of commerce they sent back through Buffalo to the East Coast and the world. But it also focuses on the people who lived and worked there, from the early brawling years of the district to its

later time as Buffalo's "Little Italy" tenement district.

Lecturer Vogel co-authored "America's Crossroads" with Ed Patton and Paul Redding. A retired journalist and editorial page editor for The Buffalo News, he has written extensively on harbor history and is president of the United States Lighthouse Society and the Buffalo Lighthouse Association, which brought the first major Tall Ships Festival to Buffalo. Vogel also serves on the board of the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp., which runs Canalside – part of what once was the Canal District.

This community event is free and open to all. Use the north door on Onondaga Street.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all guests must wear an appropriate facial covering and practice social distancing during the presentation. Hand sanitizer will be available. There will be a 50-person seating limitation.

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