
BAYTOWN'S FAMOUS TROPHY BARBER SHOP

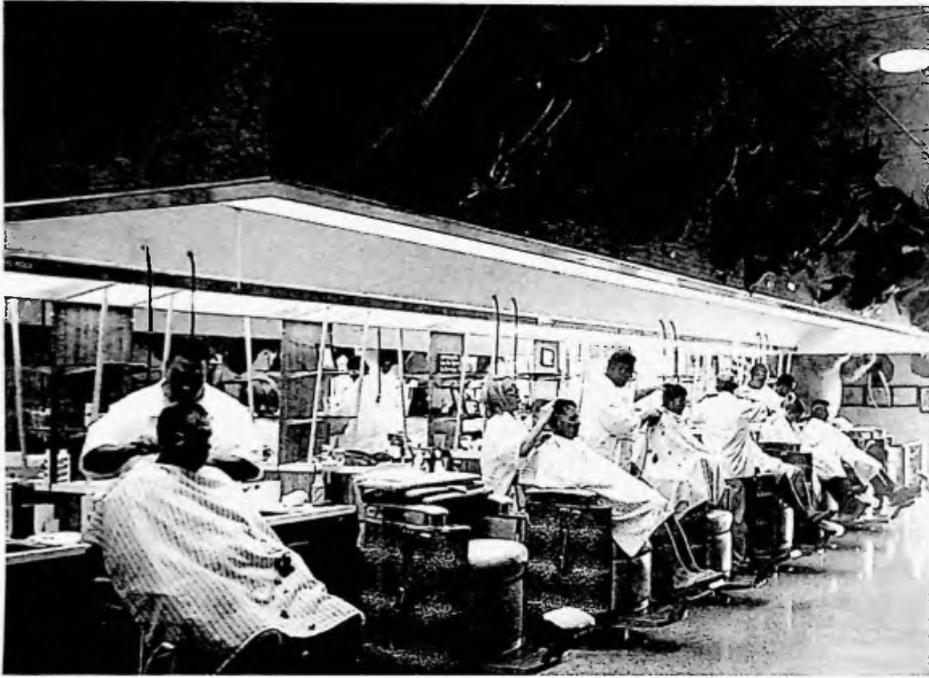
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The city of Baytown, Texas, located about 30 miles east of Houston, is widely acknowledged to be a thriving city due to the jobs that the local petrochemical plants provide; however, many people are unaware of Baytown's historical beauty. In the heart of Old Baytown's historical district, in a chain of antique stores, old-fashioned theaters, and drug stores that follow the road known as Texas Avenue, there is an old-fashioned business that lends a sense of tradition and family to Baytown. This historical gem is the Trophy Barber Shop and Styling Salon, a haircutting shop that has been open since 1948.¹ Most people who have grown up in or around Baytown have come to identify the Trophy Barber Shop as a city landmark, a place where they have repeatedly experienced the same hometown camaraderie with the barbers for their entire lives. Indeed, the shop draws a great deal of attention to Old Baytown. Previous owner Jack Jungbluth once claimed, "One day, the cash drawer held checks from eleven different towns surrounding Baytown."² Trophy Barber Shop has become, for Baytown and the surrounding areas, "as much a tourist attraction and conversation piece as a place where men [go] to get their hair cut."³

Not only is the Trophy Barber Shop known for its old-fashioned barbershop feel, but it is also widely remembered as a place with unusual décor. Jimmie Carpenter, the founder of the barbershop, was an avid hunter, and he chose to decorate his business with his hunting trophies, reportedly after his wife, Bertie, refused to allow them to remain in their home. Little did Carpenter realize, but his favorite hobby

would one day "make him famous amongst Baytownians."⁵ Inside the barbershop, one can find many various species of wildlife, from a massive polar bear to a six-foot alligator and a baboon. Seven-hundred fifty sets of antlers adorn the ceiling of the shop, extending the showcase of trophies.⁶ Elizabeth Froehlich, a reporter from the Baytown Sun, describes the trophies as "rang[ing] from domestic to exotic, from squirrels to elephant feet."⁷ Carpenter collected most of his trophies during the late 1950s and early 1960s⁸ during his hunting trips to African jungles, the frozen Arctic, and the Gobi desert, as well as other hunting locations in the United States.⁹ The shop's long wall, which faces the swiveling chairs, sports photos from Carpenter's adventures, such as his 1958 trip to Africa.¹⁰ Carpenter's favorite trophy was the eleven- or twelve-foot polar bear that stands immediately to the right of the front door inside the barber shop. Recalling the hunting chase to catch it, he said, "I got the polar bear on my last trip in '64. ... We tracked that polar bear seventy-five miles with two airplanes."¹¹ Carpenter claimed that "it was the most fascinating animal I've ever killed because he was huge! He looked like the San Jacinto Monument to me."¹² As a result of the museum-like collage of mounted animal trophies bedecking it, "the signs outside the Trophy Barber Shop proclaim it to be 'famous' and the 'World's Most Unusual.'"¹³ Indeed, it is a commonly known fact that "it is Carpenter's hunting 'trophy' heads hanging on the wall that give the shop its reputation as a Baytown original."¹⁴

Jimmie Carpenter opened his barbershop



PATRONS HAVE THEIR HAIR CUT UNDERNEATH THE ECLECTIC COLLECTION OF ANIMAL DISPLAYS AT THE TROPHY BARBER SHOP.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY BILL WHITE

on April 30, 1948,¹⁵ as “a two-chair shop called Jimmie’s Barber Shop.”¹⁶ Texas Avenue at this time was nothing close to the large business district that it would become shortly thereafter; the shop opened “before Texas Avenue was even a paved street.”¹⁷ Upon the occasion of its opening, Jimmie’s Barber Shop became “one of only three businesses in that area, with residential houses as the other neighbors.”¹⁸ Jimmie’s Barber Shop proudly catered to the haircut styles of its time, charging its original customers \$1.00 per cut.¹⁹ When the shop outgrew the space in the original building by 1960, Carpenter was forced to relocate. He found a new building and closed the shop in 1961 in order to fix up his new location.²⁰ Choosing to remain in the same area of Baytown, Carpenter moved two doors down into a space that had once been the offices of the American National Insurance Company.²¹ This office space, located at 103 E. Texas Avenue, became the permanent home of the shop after being converted into the eight-chair barbershop that it remains today, resplendent with its hunting décor. According to John Cooper, Trophy’s shoeshine man, “Jimmie Carpenter bought the entire building and leased out the extra space.”²² After

the completion of the necessary remodeling, Jimmie’s Barber Shop reopened in the new space as Trophy Barber Shop and Styling Salon in July of 1962.²³

Part of what makes Trophy Barber Shop the tradition it has become is the barbers who work there for their lifetimes. Robert Gresham, one of five barbers still working at the Trophy Barber Shop, claims, “This is a family, and these are good people.”²⁴ Because of the wonderful camaraderie between the barbers and customers, few Trophy employees ever want to quit or retire. Even after Carpenter “retired” and sold his business in 1974, he remained on board as a barber until his death of leukemia in 1980.²⁵ Despite the seeming permanence of their customers,²⁶ many of whom are fifth-generation descendants of Trophy’s original customers, Gresham believes that “employee loyalty is as strong as customer loyalty. When one of them [the employees] quits, it’s because they’ve retired. There’s no big turnover.”²⁷ These loyal employees have not only remained at Trophy Barber Shop for the “long haul,” but they have also worked to ensure that Trophy has remained the same over the years.

Two of the first employees that Carpenter hired were Milton Lorenz and Jack Jungbluth, the two men who eventually created the partnership that took over Trophy upon Carpenter's retirement. In her article "Game for a Little Safari and a Close Shave? Heads Up," Melissa Stoeltje, a reporter for the Houston Chronicle, claims that Lorenz and Jungbluth "came to [Trophy Barber Shop] via identical routes: both were fresh out of military service and barber school. They heard about Carpenter's shop, wrote him letters, and got hired—first Lorenz, then Jungbluth."²⁸ Lorenz was looking for employment in 1946 after serving in World War II, and he applied to barber school when "he learned that the government would pay him \$120.00 to attend a barber school in Austin."²⁹ In 1948, he answered an ad that Carpenter had placed in the newspaper, and, after being hired, he remained at Trophy until his retirement in 2001.³⁰ Jungbluth answered a similar ad and was hired shortly after Lorenz in 1948. In 2000, Lorenz expressed his satisfaction in having worked for Carpenter, saying, "He was a great boss to work for. He cared for his employees and customers and mixed pleasure with business."³¹ Together, Lorenz and Jungbluth watched Texas Avenue become a major center of business and recreation in Baytown. In 1998, Lorenz recalled the slow changing of Old Baytown: "It really started changing around the 60's. ... That's when kids started cruising Texas Avenue."³² He also remembered the evolution of hairstyling within Trophy Barber Shop during the many years of his employment: "Hair styling grew in popularity in the 1970's, and a special room is still set up in the back of the shop for hair styling, although business back there is slow. It's all haircutting now."³³ Because Carpenter frequently went on hunting expeditions, Jungbluth and Lorenz began managing Trophy Barber Shop several years prior to buying it in 1974.³⁴ Froehlich sums up Lorenz's career, writing, "Milton Lorenz worked his whole career for Jimmie Carpenter until the veteran barber and avid hunter retired. Then, Lorenz bought the business [in conjunction with Jungbluth]."³⁵ After twenty years of ownership,



GOING TO THE TROPHY BARBER SHOP IS A TRADITION FOR CUSTOMERS OF ALL AGES.

Lorenz proudly claimed that "the place pretty much looks the same" and joked that "the only thing that has changed [in Trophy Barber Shop] is the animals have aged." Jungbluth also expressed his satisfaction with Trophy's unique timelessness in 1999: "[Real barbering] is a vanishing trade."³⁶ Both Jungbluth and Lorenz retired in 2001 upon the sale of Trophy Barber Shop to Randall Ashby, a fellow lifelong barber.³⁷

Joe Mcshan was another faithful employee of Trophy Barber Shop who helped build the Trophy tradition for many years. Mcshan grew up in Baytown, attended Robert E. Lee High School, and got his first job bagging purchases for customers at the Burnett Brothers' store, a grocery that had been on the corner of Texas Avenue and Main Street since 1928.³⁸ Convinced by Carpenter to become a barber, Mcshan entered barber school just two days after he graduated from high school.³⁹ Having known Mcshan since he was a toddler, Carpenter gladly promised him a job before he went to barber school and made good on his promise when Mcshan graduated in January 1956.⁴⁰ Fellow



COURTNEY STOCKETT AND PROFESSOR JOHN BRITT STAND IN FRONT OF ONE OF THE SHOP'S MOST EXOTIC ANIMALS.

employees characterized Mcshan as “a genuinely good guy,”⁴¹ “a guy who knew everyone in Baytown,”⁴³ and a “hunter and fisherman.” Mcshan remained at Trophy for nearly fifty years,⁴⁴ proud of its unchanged state throughout the time he spent there. He lovingly called it “just an old-fashioned barber shop”⁴⁵ and helped maintain the straightforward conversations that Trophy became known for. In 2000, Mcshan described his typical pattern of conversation with customers and fellow barbers: “I talk fishing in the spring, football in the fall, and deer hunting in the winter,” he said.⁴⁶ This unchanging, friendly, conversational banter charmed customers for years, causing them to feel that Joe Mcshan was a friend and someone they should visit often. Another employee who could never bear to leave Trophy, Mcshan worked at the barbershop until his death of a heart attack⁴⁷ in December 2005.⁴⁸

John Cooper has become one of Trophy Barber Shop’s best-known fixtures over the years. Ever since his first day of work for Carpenter over forty years ago on July 26, 1964,⁴⁹ at age 33,⁵⁰ Cooper has faithfully been working as a shoe-shine man at Trophy.⁵¹ Earlier, Cooper had worked as a shoe-shine man in Houston;⁵² he began working at Trophy at a time when “he could not find a job elsewhere as a result of his epilepsy.”⁵³ Cooper’s shoe-shine stand is situated in a corner underneath a large golden eagle trophy and the head of a Cape buffalo. When asked about the development of Old Baytown, Cooper sits and reminisces about the earlier days on Texas Avenue: “This street used to have parking meters on both sides. The shoe and saddle business across the street was here when I came in 1964. The Texas Avenue oak tree is the symbol of Baytown. That was the main part of town then. There was a JCPenney’s on this street, you know.”⁵⁴ Cooper also remembers the early days of his employment: “When I came here, all eight chairs would be filled up all the time. We used to have so much business that people would sit on the floor and wait outside to get their hair cut. We even had a table for people to get manicures at.”⁵⁵ According to Gresham, “John Cooper is [at Trophy] every day 15 minutes early, and he is the last one to leave every night.”⁵⁶ During the years Trophy was owned by Lorenz and Jungbluth, Cooper was one of the only full-time shoe shiners in the Baytown area; this is definitely the case in recent days.⁵⁷ For only \$4.00, Cooper can make shoes shine as they never have before and give a commentary on the latest Houston Astros game that he listened to on his portable radio. Barrett Goldsmith, a reporter for the Baytown Sun, claims that Cooper is “as much of a fixture [at Trophy] as the antlers, the old-fashioned shears, and the rotary telephones.”⁵⁸ Discussing the evolution of his job at Trophy over the years, Cooper claims, “Before there were five or six shine boys. We charged 25 cents. Now I’m the only one left. Used to be people would wear dress shoes all the time, but now these tennis shoes and blue jeans mess me up.”⁵⁹ Although Cooper claims to be

almost retired, he goes to Trophy Barber Shop seven days a week and works at his church as a janitor.⁶⁰ But John Cooper provides Trophy Barber Shop with something that no one else can—a sense of history, tradition, and southern hospitality.

In 2001, Trophy Barber Shop passed into the hands of Randall Ashby,⁶¹ who had worked as a barber under Lorenz and Jungbluth since 1978.⁶² After taking possession of the business on January 2, 2001,⁶³ Ashby, who still owns Trophy, worked carefully to maintain the romanticism and traditions surrounding the barbershop. When asked what changes he has made since he took over, Ashby emphatically claimed, "I haven't changed anything! It stays the same."⁶⁴ Indeed, the prices are the only things that have changed over the years: while haircuts were \$1.00 in Trophy Barber Shop's early days, they now cost \$10.50.⁶⁵ Besides himself and four other barbers, Ashby continues to employ John Cooper, Trophy's seventy-five-year-old shoe-shine man. Ashby fondly remembers the 1990s as the busiest years of his career at Trophy.⁶⁶ Unable to articulate what Trophy has meant to him and to Baytown over the years, Ashby chokes up a little and says, "I don't know how it would have been [in Baytown] if Trophy hadn't been here."⁶⁷ Many of Ashby's patrons feel the same way about Trophy; the majority of haircuts given at Trophy are for repeat customers.⁶⁸ Many of these customers were or are children who are fascinated by the menagerie of trophies and the friendly barbers. Cooper likes to point out that no Trophy owner, including Ashby, has ever been forced to advertise to increase business—in addition to the repeat customers, the powerful force of word-of-mouth communication has always provided Trophy with new customers.⁶⁹

Chris Roux and Robert Gresham, two of Trophy's five current barbers, feel that Trophy has played a very important role within the lives of Baytownians. Describing the importance of Trophy among Baytown businesses, Roux, who first began work at Trophy on November 8, 2004,⁷⁰ claims, "I've never seen a barber shop as large and well-kept as this one."⁷¹ He



AT THE TROPHY BARBER SHOP, EACH HAIRCUT IS INDIVIDUALLY HAND-CRAFTED.

goes a step farther by naming Trophy "one of the few monuments we have that make Baytown unique."⁷² When asked about retirement, Roux responds in the traditional Trophy way: "I could retire when I'm fifty-five, but that would be a decision to quit seeing my friends, both the customers and the barbers. Now who would want to do that?"⁷³ Gresham also expresses his love for Trophy: "One of the things I love best about Trophy is the relaxed atmosphere. Easygoing employees and easygoing customers. You're not gonna get a universal haircut [here]. You'll get a haircut that fits your head, a hand-crafted haircut."⁷⁴ Connecting Trophy Barber Shop to Baytown's families, Gresham explains, "Trophy represents family, and Baytown represents family and is full of family-oriented people. All of the people here are from Baytown."⁷⁵ This statement is proven by the many stories that Trophy has collected over the years. One such legendary story is that of Lorenz's traveling barber service. When Fred Hartman was hospitalized in 1995 prior to his death, Lorenz traveled to the hospital to give him his final haircut.⁷⁶

Gresham's theory is further validated by the many families who make Trophy Barber Shop into a family tradition. Attracted by

Trophy's southern hospitality, many families go to Trophy Barber Shop to celebrate special occasions, such as first haircuts or birthday haircuts. It is true that one can walk into Trophy and inevitably encounter a young boy gazing in awe at the trophies with his father, grandfather, or mother, whether this trip is for a first haircut or for his regular trip every six weeks. One example of how Trophy has become a family destination is the Hebert family, who has made Trophy a family tradition for several generations. Beverly Hebert was impressed by Trophy in 1966, a time when she was new to town and "didn't know a soul."⁷⁷ Recollecting her experience at Trophy, Hebert claims, "It was like a Louisiana welcome-wagon. They gave my son, Malcolm, a free haircut because it was his first. We were poor as dirt and that helped us out a lot."⁷⁸ Many years later in 1991, Eva Stockett, Beverly Hebert's daughter, kept this new tradition alive by taking her oldest son, Taylor, to get his first haircut at Trophy. When asked why it was important for Taylor to get his first haircut at Trophy, Stockett remarked, "I took him there because I wanted that milestone to happen in a significant place. I wanted it to be something he would remember all of his life."⁷⁹ Stockett also explained the importance of this family tradition: "Every parent wants to hand the baton of significance, values, and memories to [his or her] child. Trophy is a connection to the past. People go there expecting to make a memory. The places that I love—I want my children to experience them like I have because it creates a bond between two things that I love."⁸⁰ Confirming his mother's story, Taylor Stockett describes his first haircut as "a very important and cherished memory" and anticipates passing on the Trophy tradition in the future, claiming, "If I have a son, I will take him to get his first haircut there, too."⁸¹ To this family and many others, Trophy Barber Shop has always been something special. It is one place where

the past is kept alive and one can experience the traditional southern hospitality that is frequently forgotten elsewhere.

Trophy Barber Shop has remained a solid fixture in Baytown throughout the many years since it opened in 1948. Jane Howard, in her article "Trophy Turns 50 Today," articulates the importance of Trophy Barber Shop in Baytown's history: "As Baytown celebrates its 50th anniversary as a city, only a handful of businesses can say they've been around as long. One of those is Trophy Barber Shop, where Baytown-area boys have been getting their first haircuts since 1948."⁸² Goldsmith describes the tradition surrounding Trophy in his article "Trophy Barber Shop a Landmark on Texas Avenue": "For nearly sixty years, Trophy Barber Shop has been serving up no frills cuts for its clientele—fathers, sons, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers. They're already on their fifth generation of customers."⁸³ Because going to Trophy Barber Shop has become a family tradition over the years, it is no surprise that Trophy has had no slow periods. Even when Texas Avenue began slowing and becoming run-down due to increased business on Baytown's Garth Road, Trophy Barber Shop experienced no lack of customers. According to Froehlich, "Even in the last decade or so when many businesses closed or moved away, Trophy has kept its steady stream of customers coming in. Its mainstay is that Trophy is a tradition passed down from men to their sons for generations."⁸⁴ Lorenz believed in 2000 that "it may be the trophies Carpenter decorated his shop with between 1949 and 1964 that make Trophy a Baytown landmark, but ... it is the haircut that brings customers back." Even though Carpenter did not live to see the result of all of his years of hard work, "the story of his life lives on through his friends, colleagues, and his former business, a shrine to his favorite hobby—hunting."⁸⁵

END NOTES

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- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Elizabeth Froehlich, "Tradition Builds on Self to Keep Business Up: Longtime Barbers Clipping Hair for Fourth, Sometimes Fifth Generations of Original Customers," *The Baytown Sun*, 10 February 1994, B1.
- ⁵ Elizabeth Froehlich, "Tradition Builds on Self to Keep Business Up." B1.
- ⁶ Robert Gresham, interview by Courtney Stockett. 5 March 2007.
- ⁷ Elizabeth Froehlich, "Trophy's Wild Is Unusual." *The Baytown Sun*, 10 February 1994, B1.
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- ²¹ Elizabeth Froehlich, "Tradition Builds on Self to Keep Business Up." B1.
- ²² John Cooper, interview by Courtney Stockett, 14 April 2007.
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- ²⁵ Jane Howard, "Trophy Turns 50 Today." A1.
- ²⁶ Barrett Goldsmith, "Trophy Barber Shop a Landmark on Texas Avenue." 7C.
- ²⁷ Elizabeth Froehlich, "Tradition Builds on Self to Keep Business Up." 1B.
- ²⁸ Melissa F. Stoeltje, "Game for a Little Safari and Close Shave?" 1D, 3D.
- ²⁹ Jonathan Cooper, "Barber May Hang Up His Clippers in 2001." 1A, 2A.
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- ³⁶ Melissa F. Stoeltje, "Game for a Little Safari and a Close Shave?" 1D, 3D.
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⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Jonathan Cooper, "Barber May Hang Up His Clippers in 2001." 1A, 2A.

⁷⁷ Beverly Hebert, interview by Courtney Stockett, 15 April 2007.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Eva Stockett, interview by Courtney Stockett, 15 April 2007.

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⁸¹ Taylor Stockett, interview by Courtney Stockett, 15 April 2007.

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