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BEST HAIR SALON AND BEST OLD-FASHIONED BARBER SHOP

Top Notch Haircutters, Branford

If you haven't heard Top Notch Haircutters mentioned as a top salon or, alternately, assumed, from the barber's pole twirling red, white and blue in front of the business on the Montowese side of the Branford Green, that it's simply a barber shop, you're not alone.

Top Notch, which readers voted both Best Hair Salon and Best Old-Fashioned Barber Shop, is not world-renowned, like its next-door neighbor, Le Petit Cafe. There's no sleek blow dry lounge or hipster shampoo technician. There's no flat-screen TV; in its place, good old-fashioned chatter.

In its 41 years of existence, the unassuming shop with the casual neighborhood atmosphere hasn't tried to reinvent itself into a cutting-edge salon. Over those same 41 years, co-owner John Barbaro has taken out one ad, and that was in a circular.

He's never had to; that's how loyal the client base has been, with some coming weekly from areas outside the Shoreline for upwards of 20 years. It's also word-of-mouth that has kept Top Notch thriving for so long.

The reason: stylists like Cher lookalike Deb Mar-

cello, Debbie Bray, and Michelle Stoub who get that choosing a stylist is not so different from choosing a therapist. You want someone you're comfortable spending time with, who's not an apprentice and knows what she's doing, who makes you feel better about yourself and can identify and work with your specific needs.

And barbers like co-owners Barbaro and Ron Bova, who doubles as barber and tireless sports opinionator, who understand that a trim should mean a trim; that it's important beforehand to discuss what a client hopes

to get out of the appointment; that someone styling your hair with a phone attached to his ear tends to be distracted from the task at hand.

It's quite simple, really. At a time when specialty salons sprout every month or so and close not long after, the barber's pole outside the shop continues its steady revolve. Maybe that's why Top Notch never needed any bells and whistles; it's never tried to be anything other than what it is.

225 Montowese St., Branford. 203-481-3174; topnotchhaircutters.com.

— Lisa Reisman

