

**By BRIAN ACKLEY**  
**WIN Columnist**

I did something last week I haven't done in about 20 years. I had someone cut my hair.

No, I wasn't a hair-down-to-my waist Woodstock wannabe. I regularly get crops, coifs and cuts from my friendly neighborhood chain stylists. Call it the standard issue zip n' clip. Those places serve me just fine, even if I'm not in the market for shampoos filled with sunflower petals, clover blossoms or lemongrass.

Despite whatever name they use, it's at least a slight exaggeration to say the work was always fantastic or super. It is always good -- serviceable at minimum for most daily needs -- but nothing to get hyperbolic about.

Nope, this time the big box was busy, so I went to an honest-to-goodness-red-and-white-striped-spinning-pole-in-the-front barber shop. And it was, I kid you not, fun.

Instead of exotic products, the only liquid I couldn't identify was the mysterious cylinder of blue tonic in which the tools of the craft were carefully washed in between cuts. I don't think it is the stuff you squirt on your windshield but I don't know what it is, either. It isn't a real barber shop, I don't think, without it. Same for the corn stalk whiskbroom, circa 1970, which between customers flies into action meticulously cleaning off the chair.

Instead of full color posters featuring pretty people and their Hollywood "dos", an actual but weathered diploma from a real barber college hung on an otherwise unadorned wall. It had been displayed there so long, and proudly I'm sure, the date had long since faded from the parchment. I asked. It used to read 1964.

I made actual conversation with the man behind the scissors. I rarely do that in the standard issue clip joints. Sadly, but certainly not surprisingly, I'm not overly versed in the ways of Britney Spears, the latest stars from American Idol, or the redeeming values of Ben Affleck marrying Jennifer Lopez.. The shop -- two chairs, one barber, who even asked if I wanted my beard trimmed -- sits in the shadows of Ralph Wilson Stadium, so we talked football. Rian Lindell, the Bills' new place kicker, had been in the week before. I'll be rooting extra hard for him this season.

And since I was actually in the chair for a good 30 minutes, I got to thinking about how often we forgo small town America for the dreaded "big box" stores of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Don't get me wrong. In the interest of full disclosure I confess: I love Wal-Mart. I often joke that if you can't find it at Wal-Mart, you don't need it.

But what I really love, or think I do, is the convenience. The products aren't better, the service isn't as personal, and the rush to get an oil change, filled prescription, eye exam and box of kitty litter all within the half hour or so we allot ourselves for such tasks can be downright draining.

Suburbanites, planners, developers, they all continually wrestle with the issue, some with more success than others. The notion of limiting building size has recently bubbled to the surface once again in Aurora, a town that has nobly, stubbornly, proudly battled commercial creep more successfully than some. Deep down, there's a part of us rooting for them to stand tough.

True, it took extra effort to have someone cut my hair, as opposed to just getting a hair cut. Take a moment; you'll understand the difference. It won't be 20 years until my next visit.

*(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers (WIN) of Western New York. WIN is a consortium of 19 community weekly newspapers in Erie and Niagara counties with a combined paid circulation of 75,000 homes, providing collaborative advertising and editorial support for member publications. For more information on WIN, or to provide feedback on this column, visit our website at [www.wnynewspapers.com](http://www.wnynewspapers.com). Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)*