

Anthony Mancinelli, World's Oldest Working Barber, Dies at 108

A barber who spent nearly a century of cutting hair in upstate New York “didn’t know the meaning of the word retired.”



By Corey Kilgannon

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When Anthony Mancinelli became a barber nearly a century ago, Warren Harding was in the White House, a haircut cost 25 cents and leeches were still used to treat high blood pressure.

As hairstyles changed over the decades, he adapted.

“I cut them all,” he told The New York Times last year, “long hair, short hair, whatever was in style — the shag, the Buster Brown, straight bangs, permanents.”

“I have some customers, I cut their father, grandfather and great-grandfather — four generations,” he added.

Mr. Mancinelli never stopped cutting hair — except to join the Army and serve in World War II — and in his 90s he was recognized by Guinness World Records as the world’s oldest working barber.

He died on Sept 19 at his home in New Windsor, N.Y., a Hudson River town about an hour’s drive north of New York City. He was 108. His son, Bob, 82, said the cause was cancer of the jaw. His father had retired, reluctantly, only weeks before.

“He didn’t know the meaning of the word retired,” Bob Mancinelli said.

Anthony Mancinelli was born on March 2, 1911, near Naples, Italy, and emigrated to the United States with his family when he was 8, joining relatives in Newburgh, just north of New Windsor. He began helping out in barbershops when he was 11 and started working as a barber when he was 12. He dropped out of high school to cut hair full time.

In 1930, he opened Anthony’s Barbershop in Newburgh and kept it going for 40 years, before selling the business and going to work at other shops.



Mr. Mancinelli in 2010. “The longer he kept working, the more famous he got,” said Jane Dinezza, the owner of Fantastic Cuts, where he last worked. Earl Wilson/The New York Times

His fame began growing in earnest at age 96, when he was recognized by Guinness as the world's oldest working barber. The commendations kept rolling in — from local civic groups, elected officials and barbering companies — all congratulating him: at 100 years old, 101, 102 and so on.

“The longer he kept working, the more famous he got,” said Jane Dinezza, the owner of Fantastic Cuts in New Windsor, the last salon where Mr. Mancinelli worked.

Over time, she said in a phone interview, she became less of his boss and more of a liaison to media outlets, as reporters started showing up to interview him, seating him in his own barber chair. “He was spending more time in the chair than his customers,” Ms. Dinezza said.

Instead of paying the usual \$20 for a haircut, many customers would insist on giving him up to \$100 a cut, she said. And he was invited to so many events, she said, “I started saying, ‘No, I’m sorry, it’s just too much hoopla for him — you know, he’s not the pope.’”

Mr. Mancinelli retained a trim build, a steady hand and a full head of snow-white hair. Even in his final years he spent long hours on his feet, in a pair of worn, cracked black leather shoes.

His good health baffled his doctor, he said. He was on no daily medication and never wore glasses.

“He never took a pill in his life,” Ms. Dinezza said. “Towards the end, people would follow him through the grocery store just to ask him the secret to living that long. He’d just point up to God.”



Mr. Mancinelli retired only weeks before his death, at 108. “He was angry about it — he thought he could keep going,” his employer said. Andrew Seng for The New York Times

Longevity did not run in his family, and he was never big on exercise. Diet-wise, he said, “I eat thin spaghetti, so I don’t get fat.”

When pressed, Mr. Mancinelli would cite his love for his work and his avoidance of smoking and heavy drinking. Even after age 100, however, he did enjoy the occasional whiskey sour at his American Legion Post 1796 in New Windsor, where he was a member for 75 years.

In addition to his son, Mr. Mancinelli is survived by four grandchildren and several great- and great-great-grandchildren. His wife of 70 years, Carmella, died in 2004, and Mr. Mancinelli visited her grave every morning on his drive to work.

In recent months he had become weaker and even fell in the shop, his son said. Ms. Dinezza then broached the topic of retirement.

“He was angry about it — he thought he could keep going,” she said. “My daughter said, ‘Don’t do it, Mom, he’ll just get a job at another salon.’”

Mr. Mancinelli agreed to retire and relax at home. But he remained fiercely independent in his final years, living alone, doing his own shopping and cooking and laundry and religiously watching pro-wrestling on TV.

He also insisted on continuing to trim the hedges in his yard.

“He’d say, ‘No, I’ll trim them myself,’” his son said. “‘I’m a barber.’”

Corey Kilgannon is a Metro reporter covering news and human interest stories. He was also part of the team that won the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News. [More about Corey Kilgannon](#)

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