

features

Exchanging clip-on ties for clippers
Adam Pry gave up sales to become a barber

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Adam Pry squats down slightly to get a better angle, he tilts his head to the right to make sure his alignment is straight, then he leans toward his subject.

He removes the cap of powder off the back of the man's head, letting the ponytail lose.

Pry wipes the shaving cream off his razor and sets it down peering at the island of long hair that he carved out of the man's head.

He then reaches for his clippers and saws into two trunks that leak from the mans face. He turns the two trees into branches interwoven like braids at the tip.

Once he has finished, he steps back to review his work, lifts his oval shaped mirror in front of the man and asks,

"What do you think?"

The man is satisfied with Pry's ability to make him a replica of MMA Referee Mike Beltran.

Two years prior, Pry satisfied customers with home appliances, not with their desired appearance, regardless of how bizarre it seemed.

Pry worked for nearly twenty years as a home remodeling sales representative. For nearly twenty months, he has worked at Smith's Barber Service & Styling alongside owner Amber Martin.

The 36-year-old bald barber received his first gig in sales at age 17 where he sold \$500,000 in suits which parlayed him into another opportunity in sales.

Already registered for college he thought: 'what's one interview hurt?'

That interview raised the financial water level to something he could swim in, so he took the job and waved goodbye to a college degree.

At age 34, Pry realized he was in too deep and decided to ditch his life in sales for something more flexible.

"Honestly, I don't think I could have picked a better thing," Pry said.

Becoming a barber was no random fantasy for Pry as the occupation was often chosen in his lineage.

"My grandfather was a barber, my great grandfather was a barber, my great great uncle was a barber so I figured it was a calling," Pry said.

That voice called out louder than the compensation he received in sales, a job that would rob him of his family life.

"At some point in your life you either got to decide if you're money driven or family driven," Pry said.

A father of one, Brunson, and husband to Natalie Pry, he often spent his evenings away from the dinner table and unable to consistently contribute in ways that stretched beyond finances.

"So when you do the sales thing, it could be the greatest thing in the world you could make as much money as you want, as long as you're willing to work," Pry confessed, "That's fine and dandy, but when you're not eating dinner with your wife or putting your kid to bed it kind of weighs on you."

Pry had to decide to choose internal fulfillment over financial stability, a decision that pushed discomfort and uncertainty in his life but would open the door to a purpose that paid him something more valuable than riches.

"A couple people thought I was crazy because you've given up something that comfortable and easy," Pry said, "I felt like I was at a point in my life where I needed some uncomfortability."

After abandoning sales, Pry enrolled at Akron Barber College to embark on a 11 month, 1800 hour test to develop his craft as a barber

ing his client.

During barber school Pry was without a job and was reliant on his wife to financially provide for their family. She was the biggest push, "she was willing to keep working so that I couldn't for a year."

Natalie Pry, his homecoming date, prom date, bride, and wife of 12 years enabled him to chase after his calling even though it seemed like that dream was outdated.

Pry said an aspect of barber school that made it tough was the age gap between him and his classmates.

"I'm in my mid-to-late thirties and I show up with 17 to 22-year-old kids,"

Pry's older age did not slow him down, he persevered and after completing his 1800 hours, he returned to the barber that cut his hair for several years, Amber Martin.

"She wasn't looking for anybody. I just knew that this was the busiest shop in town and I figured I wanted to work in town," Pry said.

clientele grew exponential with the help of one Ashland University student.

"Elijah Burch came in here and gave me my first shot," Pry said.

Last summer, Burch was desperately in search of a barber when Google directed him to Smith's Barber Service.

"I was nervous because this was my first time there and I'm serious about haircuts," Burch said.

Burch, a biracial sophomore student-athlete at AU, was skeptical of Pry's 'skillset' initially because he did not know if the Caucasian barber would be able to cut his hair.

"At first, I didn't know he could mix people's hair, let alone black people's hair," Burch said.

Pry understood the reasoning behind Burch's anxiety due to the differing textures between Caucasian and African-American hair.

"You see a white guy you might not think I can cut your hair, I totally get it," Pry said.

The haircut Burch received compelled him to spread the world

relationships with, a perk of his job is to converse with his clients, whom he often sees on a bi-weekly basis and develop friendships with them.

"You kind of start cutting hair and essentially it's a customer and those customers turn into friends and it becomes almost to the point where you're hanging out with your buddies listening to music, watching SportsCenter, talking about all the daily stuff," Pry explained.

In addition to building friendships at work, he is also more present at home and that has allowed him to contribute more as a father and husband.

"If my kid is sick it's not my wife taking off, or she's not cooking dinner every single night, I'm just contributing more," Pry said.

As barbers, Pry and Martin set their own hours and do not cut hair by appointments, this allows them to have a more flexible schedule in the event of an emergency.

"I think the leniency of it helps my family tremendously," Martin

to the exact specifications of the customer.

"What you're used to just might not happen on this cut, it might not look the same," Pry said.

Nevertheless, it does not overshadow his meticulous nature.

"I want everyone to be as happy as possible," Pry said.

Upon observing him in action, Pry frequently takes a step back from his canvas to review his work and make corrections. He uses multiple mirrors to view different vantage points, varies his clipper selection to remove accurate lengths, and finishes nearly every cut with a razor blade edge to ensure precision.

Pry's knack for dotting his I's and crossing his T's comes from the love he has for his job and he plans to cut hair until his legs can no longer support it.

"When my wife decides that she's ready to retire and we move to the beach, that's probably where my first barber shop will go,"

Pry intends on cutting hair a couple days a week in his old age working out of his first owned barber shop.

"As our life has changed I feel that as long as I can stand up behind the chair I might as well do this," Pry said, "I might as well go see my friends twice, three times a week."

Pry urges people to do what they love and not just take the easy way out.

"The easiest thing for me would have been to keep doing what I was doing, status quo, I wouldn't ever had skipped a beat, life would have went on just as normal," Pry said. "Then we throw a left curve in there, you know, your whole life changes and it's for the better,"

That left curve although difficult to identify has so far been a base hit for Pry and soon he will be rounding second, enjoying what he does even if it brings difficulty.

"You have to love what you do or like it a lot because you're doing it for the rest of your life," Martin said.

Pry is surprised that college students, at such a young age, are already set in what they want the rest of their life to look like.

"It's really hard seeing you guys get out of [high] school, some of you get scholarships to play football but you're all expected to know what you want to do, I don't know how the hell you know what you want to do," Pry said.

He is a living embodiment of a man who made a career decision at a young age and nearly 20 years later made a complete turn around into a different career path.

"I don't always feel like college is for everybody," Martin said, who went to barber school in Dayton immediately after graduating high school and has been the owner of Smith's Barber Service for over two decades.

Martin stresses there is value in work that may not accompany a four-year undergraduate degree.

"I feel like a lot of people should go to a JBS or a vocational school to see if there is anything there because unfortunately not everybody in the united states or this whole world can be corporate America," Martin said. "We still need people, my husband, to keep our electricity on, Greg there to get our goods to where they need to go, us to make people look good, people to fix our cars. We need people to do that. There are great paying jobs out there that can make better money if you want to be a hard worker."

Pry stresses the value in pursuing an occupation that may not break the bank but adds worth to life.

"It's a good feeling, even though the bank account is not set, the quality of life went up," Pry said.



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Pry takes his time cutting another one of his customers' hair. He has earned a reputation as an excellent barber.

Martin said she was initially reluctant to hire Pry because she was not looking for another barber. The last barber she worked with, Russ Forbes, cut alongside of her for 13 of his 65 years shaping hair in Ashland.

Probe passed away shortly after retiring and for over seven years before Adam arrived 19 months ago.

Pry who "lives right around the corner" from Martin experienced growing pains in his first couple months at Smith's leaving her to believe if she made the right decision.

"My first two months with Adam here I would go home with a sore neck and clenched jaw," Martin said.

As time proceeded that clinch would loosen as Pry quickly developed a clientele in his hometown.

"I'm shocked and impressed with how quickly he's built up a clientele being here only 18 months," Martin said.

about the newfound barber on E. Washington street off Clairmont avenue.

"I just think he went and told everybody that I can cut hair," Pry said.

Burch said he has referenced at least thirty people to Pry and a large portion of the Ashland University football team gets their hair trimmed and styled at Smith's. Pry also cut members of the baseball, wrestlers and soccer teams along with many international graduate students.

AU student-athletes have even convinced Pry to attend some of the university's sporting events, something he did not do until last year.

"Just since I've been in here (Smith's Barber Service) I've been to two AU football games and basketball games," Pry said. "That's been in my city my whole entire life and I've never once used it."

He said his attendance comes from his desire to mutual support

said.

Martin's pregnancy with her daughter caused her to cut her hours nearly in half and it has provided her time to invest in her two children.

"When I got pregnant with my daughter I decided you know what I need to be more family oriented and I need to be here for them," Martin said.

However, less hours equates to less money and although Pry is content with his new occupation, he cannot deny the financial decline that it has caused.

"I think eventually they'll come back, but everything takes time," Pry said.

Time will also help the growing pains the barber of less than two years has experienced.

"New hair cuts are also challenging because you're trying to figure out something that someone likes who has had limited people cut their hair," Pry said alluding to the difficulty of certain hairstyles.