

Autumn in MORRISTOWN

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A cut above: Plaza Barber Shop's 95-year tradition in Morristown

BY KAREN ROETTGER
Special to The Star-Ledger

In 1929, as the Roaring Twenties drew to a close and Wall Street's crash ushered in the Great Depression, not all was lost for Dominic Palumbo. An ambitious barber in downtown Morristown, Palumbo found an unlikely ally in the president of the First Iron National Bank, a loyal customer who recognized his potential. With encouragement — and a handshake loan — Palumbo opened the Plaza Barber Shop that November, turning a grim year into the start of a promising future.

For more than 95 years, the Plaza Barber Shop has upheld a respected reputation and loyal following. Over that time, new generations have carried the family business forward. Dominic's son, Gerard Palumbo, joined in the 1940s and worked for more than two decades before moving on in the 1960s. Around the same time, Joseph Russo — who married Dominic's daughter, Anna, in 1957 — came aboard. After Gerard's departure and Dominic's passing in 1965, Joseph took the reins and guided the shop for six decades, announcing his retirement in November 2017 — exactly 60 years to the day from his first shift. Still, even at 94, Joseph remains closely connected to the shop he helped shape. Today, the tradition continues with Joseph and Anna's children, Gerry Russo and Rosemary Monod Russo, who joined in 1984 and 1993, respectively. Gerry's son, Albert Russo, joined the family business in 2014. The Russos, along with longtime staff member Randy Shreve, are leading the Plaza Barber Shop toward its centennial celebration in 2029.

Over more than 90 years in business, the Plaza Barber Shop has weathered plenty of challenges.



Plaza Barber Shop, a community staple since 1929. Left to right are Rosemary Monod Russo, Albert Russo and Gerry Russo. Photos courtesy of Plaza Barber Shop

Opened during the Great Depression, the family learned early how to adapt and persevere. But few tests were as tough as the 1960s, when the Beatles sparked a long-hair craze that nearly put barbershops out of business. While many shops closed their doors, Plaza refused to "let it be." Instead, the family pulled together, worked tirelessly, and found a way to "work it out" until business was back — here, there, and everywhere.

Another challenge came in 2020 with the outbreak of COVID-19, when the shop was forced to close for three months under the governor's orders. At times, reopening seemed uncertain. But when the doors finally did reopen, the community showed up in support — even though business took time to recover to pre-pandemic levels. In the end, the Plaza Barber Shop endured, thanks to the loyalty of its Morristown customers and the surrounding communities.

Morristown has long been at the heart of the Palumbo and Russo families' story. Dominic chose the town as the ideal place to live, raise a family, and build a business, drawn to its strong Italian American community and suburban charm. Joseph still lives in the house his father-in-law built, a testament to those deep roots. Just as generations of Dominic's family have carried on his work at the shop, generations of customers have passed through its doors. It's common to see sons and grandsons returning for haircuts during school breaks, holidays, weddings, and

Joseph Russo gives his grandson Joel a trim, carrying on the Plaza Barber Shop tradition with family pride.

family celebrations. The clientele reflects the shop's long history, ranging from toddlers to centenarians, professionals to tradespeople, many of whom travel back to Morristown simply to reconnect. The family, in turn, has remained committed to giving back, supporting organizations such as the Morristown Columbian Club, Italian American Club, Morristown Babe Ruth, the Knights of Columbus Council #359, and St. Virgil's Church.

Now in its fourth generation, the family continues to uphold the values set by their grandfather, uncle, and father: courtesy above all, and a commitment to giving every customer exactly what they came for — always with a smile.

It's been a long and winding 95-plus years but as the Plaza Barber Shop nears its 100th anniversary in November 2029, they look forward to celebrating with Joseph, who will be 99 that year. And, of course, they hope to carry on for many years to come with a little

The shop provides grooming services for men, women, and children, along with shaves and beard trims or shape-ups.

HOURS OF OPERATION:
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday: 8 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.
Saturday: 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Closed on Wednesday and Sunday (except during holidays weeks)

Plaza Barber Shop takes appointments and always strives to accommodate walk-ins. For information, visit them on Facebook and Instagram, or call (973) 267-6616.



Grand Harvest Wine Festival set for Oct. 4-5



New Jersey wineries embrace the festival as a time to salute the season and unveil some of their newest offerings for the Fall.

The Grand Harvest Wine Festival is back again to celebrate a wonderful time of the year!

There is no better place to enjoy New Jersey on a crisp Autumn afternoon than on the grounds of Fosterfields Living Historical Farm in Morristown. The event will be held Oct. 4-5 from noon to 5 p.m. both days.

Once you spend a day at this event you will know why so many mark their calendars every year to attend this fabulous, seasonal festival. There is nothing like sitting in the back field surrounded by Autumn leaves, enjoying great wine, listening to fabulous bands, enjoying culinary cuisine from some of New Jersey's best food trucks, shopping artisan crafters and just relaxing with family and friends.

New Jersey wineries always embrace this event as a time to salute Autumn and unveil some of their newest offerings for the Fall. Excitement for this



annual event is quite astounding, with attendees inquiring about tickets months in advance.

Pumpkin spice coffee, apple cider and hot cocoa are great, but nothing compares to a lovely Fall afternoon surrounded by great people and even greater wineries. Come enjoy a crisp Fall weekend at New Jersey's salute to Autumn event.

For advance discount tickets and more information, visit newjerseywineevents.com.



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