

[OFF THE CUFF] A Cut Above

Jason DeCarlo knows how to give a great haircut.

He also knows that marketing himself in Mil-town is as important as taming those nasty split ends.

"I've styled hair for everything from fashion shows to NASCAR events," says DeCarlo, owner and stylist of DiCarlo Salon. Centrally located Downtown, DeCarlo has watched business boom since opening in November 2005. He attributes much of his success to keeping a style-savvy presence at some of the city's less conventional haunts—like the Milwaukee Mile.

"I do hair and makeup for the Mile's 'Grid Girls,'" he says. When the girls compete in the Mile's version of a trackside beauty pageant, DeCarlo provides a big prize for the winner—a year's worth of hair and makeup services at his Euro-vibed salon.

How else is this local 31-year-old giving good face to his business, his clients—and that tricky twist on his surname?

Your name is spelled Jason DeCarlo. Why, then, is it DiCarlo Salon?

DiCarlo is actually the traditional Italian spelling. When my father's ancestors came over from Italy, they Americanized it. A lot of people in my family have been talking about switching it back and no one's really done it. I decided it was time.

How did you make use of your time before opening shop?

I bounced around the city quite a bit, working at places like Salone and Supercuts. I started the salon with just myself; now I have five stylists, including a color specialist.

We heard she's renowned.

Yes, Abby Pollpeter from Beauty. Since she's come onboard, she's brought in a whole new base of clients, because she already has quite an established following. All the other girls here are "barberettes" and stylists. It's a pretty masculine salon. Girls love that.

Masculine in terms of aesthetic or services?

Well, our niche is the \$15 men's haircut. That's really taking off for us. We're right in the middle of the business district, so we get a lot of traffic from business guys on their lunch hour. For \$15 we'll wash, cut and style you up. We also do facial grooming and trims.

What is DiCarlo Salon doing that other local salons—or "new school barbers"—aren't?

We focus on our quality but at the same time we focus on our time. We allow walk-ins on a regular basis. A great deal of our business comes from walk-ins. Sometimes other salons won't take you if they're too busy.

It seems like you're also busy working with the local arts community.

My salon has partnered up with the In and Out Gallery. I'm doing all the hair and makeup for a fashion show we are hosting on Sept. 8. I also conduct this program called "Save a Starving Artist." I keep my wall space open to the independent artists I get through MIAD, UW-Milwaukee—all types of artists. I know how much of a struggle

it can be, because I've been through it. The way I see it, my hair is my art.

You also market your salon as having a European vibe. What exactly does that mean—a cappuccino with your color, perhaps?

I spent some time in London to check out the style of salons there and I went after that. We're an underground [below ground] salon, which gives it a cooler vibe. We also play chill Euro-pop-music, and, yes, we have a cappuccino maker, and beer and wine too.

DiCarlo Salon is located at 767 N. Water St. www.dicarloaloon.com. Call 414-765-1985 for information and appointments. Free valet parking in the CPS parking tower on Mason and Water (with validation).

—Jenn Danko



COREY HENGEN