

BEST AUTO SHOP



Dwight Caswell

Jim Varner, whose namesake automotive shop won first place in Readers' Choice, again.

Jim Varner's Automotive

ASTORIA

By DWIGHT CASWELL

Runner-up: Lum's Auto Center, Warrenton

Honorable mention: Box K Auto Repair, Long Beach, Wash.

Jim Varner is known as a diagnostician of automotive infirmities, and his garage at Miles Crossing is a Mayo Clinic for vehi-

cles. Indeed, one of his customers goes so far as to label him "the car whisperer."

It seems that Varner thrives because his customers do not feel the need to look for second and third opinions.

One's first impression upon entering the garage, unlikely as it sounds, is cleanliness. Rows of parts stand neatly on shelves above immaculate, shining floors. On

the lifts you'll find everything from commercial trucks to hot rods (Varner and his son and daughter drag race) and classics under restoration.

Varner says the secret to his success is that "I hire people who are better mechanics than I am."

That may be, but another reason may be that the guy is just so darn cheerful. He tells you it's an engine rebuild in such an affable way that you think, "Wow, I thought it was something serious." No wonder Varner wins the Readers' Choice award year after year after year. **CW**

BEST BARBERSHOP

Eleventh Street Barber

ASTORIA

By RYAN HUME

Runner-up: Astoria Barber

Honorable mention: Hygge Hair Company, Astoria

Eleventh Street Barber in Astoria has single-handedly locked down the Best Barbershop category in the Readers' Choice awards since it was first introduced in the 2015 contest. Needing a much-needed cut, this Coast Weekend writer decided to take a seat, throw on the cape and ask the barber-shop's owner, Sarah Jane Bardy, how she does it.

Coast Weekend: When I first met you it was almost six years ago ...

Sarah Jane Bardy: Wow! It's like time flies ... Yeah, because we have been open six years on (January) 1st.

CW: When we first met, you were struggling to find talent. Now you are at a point, where you have another chair — you're five deep. The waiting time is much less. So what do you think changed?

SJB: Well, more people moved to Astoria. Every eligible barber and hair stylist in the area was employed elsewhere. So I was advertising on Craigslist, everywhere from San Diego to Vancouver, Canada, all the way to Idaho, looking for people. And I did get people, like Jack (Powell), who saw it on the Eugene Craigslist. But everyone else has just moved here, and



Colin Murphey

Sarah Jane Bardy, owner of Eleventh Street Barber, jokes with Coast Weekend writer Ryan Hume in her shop.

been a barber, looking for work. Barbering isn't something that you can just decide to give it a try. You have to go to school for a year, so it's a limited pool to hire from.

But, yeah, we were wildly understaffed for years and now we are not, and it is awesome. It's so much better!

Well, there are still times when we are just looking around at each other and then the floodgates open. The best time to get your haircut is during the Civil War — Oregon State versus the University of Oregon football game — for years, we are dead on that day.

CW: So a barbershop is kind of more than a haircut?

SJB: We have a lot of people who come here and don't get a haircut. Which I felt like, we made it when that happened. The barber-shop is a social gathering place. So that makes me very happy, and I don't mind that they are not getting a haircut. I don't know — it's like, some people go to church and some people go to the barbershop. **CW**

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