

IN BUSINESS

Tightened Belts, Longer Hair

Barbers and Salons Find Customers Postponing Haircuts, and Clients Look for a Cheaper Cut



By SUSAN HODARA

BERNICE SCHARGEL, Patricia Ryan, Nancy Carroll and Janet Chan all wear their hair in short, chic styles. Each visits a salon regularly. Before tips, Ms. Schargel pays \$120 for her cut, Ms. Ryan pays \$57, Ms. Carroll \$28, and Ms. Chan, \$16.

This discrepancy represents the range of the price of a haircut throughout Westchester. While these women and others maintain that their choice of stylist is driven by quality rather than price, in the shadow of a tightened economy, more of those in need of a trim are factoring cost into the equation.

Janet Chan, a car saleswoman in Mount Kisco, itemized her priorities when it comes to her hair. Cut, price, convenience, she said, all three of which are fulfilled at Fred's Haircutting Salon in Katonah, where Ms.



Omar Roth, above, director and stylist at José Eber Salon at The Westchester; far left, Fred Ionta, owner of Fred's Haircutting



Omar Roth, above, director and stylist at José Eber Salon at The Westchester; far left, Fred Ionta, owner of Fred's Haircutting Salon in Katonah, and left, employees working at Fred's. Right, Katie O'Connor cuts the hair of Casey Dunn, 5, at the Hair Wharf in Katonah.



Photographs by Joyce Doppen/The New York Times

their hair. I'd rather buy books."

The salon business continues to grow in Westchester. The number of employees of Westchester beauty shops increased 17 percent between 1996 and 2001, rising to 2,175 from 1,859; barber shop employees jumped 38 percent over the same period, to 119 from 86, according to Sean McDonald, associate economist for the New York State Department of Labor. Employee growth rate was 12.2 percent in all county service industries.

Yet the growth has been affected by the economic climate, with those charging mid-range prices reporting the greatest effect. Carol Gattucci, co-owner with her husband, John, of the Hair Wharf in Katonah, said her prices (haircuts \$50) were due to rise in September, but she held off because of the recession. Meanwhile she is absorbing the rising costs of the products she uses, and her stylists are receiving smaller raises. She is also trying to accommodate the needs of longtime customers who may be struggling financially.

"If someone is unemployed," she said, "we'll work out a payment plan or discount according to the situation."

The Cherylyn Salon in Hartsdale, where haircuts are \$45 to \$59 for women, \$35 for men, hasn't increased its rates for a year and a half, despite rising expenses.

"There was an increase in taxes," said Cheryl Lynch, the salon's owner, "as well as

in product costs. We spend \$250 a week on coffee and snacks alone." She said her salon's weekly expenditures total roughly \$22,000.

Angelo Torzilli, the owner of the Hair Exchange, a 20-year-old business in Pleasantville, where haircuts range from \$69 to \$80, said business has slowed for him this year. The Hair Exchange is near Thornwood, where most salons charge between \$20 to \$30.

"Customers are stretching their appointments from every three to four weeks to every seven to eight weeks," Mr. Torzilli said, "and they're postponing various treatments."

Even some salons charging the lowest rates are not immune to the effects of the economy. "People are trying to save," said Fred Ionta, owner of Fred's, where up to 15 hairdressers are kept busy six days a week. "They'll come in every six weeks instead of every three. We're all in the same boat."

NEVERTHELESS, there are those who consider even the most expensive haircut money well spent if they are pleased with the results.

Patricia Ryan, a writer who lives in Irvington, followed her stylist to her present location, Salon Shin in Eastchester, where Ms. Ryan enjoys a scalp massage during shampooing and a shoulder and neck mas-

sage after her cut. Ms. Ryan said her haircuts, along with the relaxing experience, are worth the \$57 price.

Ms. Schargel of Mamaroneck, acknowledged that the José Eber Salon in The Westchester in White Plains, is one of the most expensive in the county, but she still visits her stylist there every six weeks.

Karen Brand, a chef who lives in Pleasantville, considers her \$120 haircut at José Eber a bargain compared with what she paid when she lived in Manhattan. Now she maintains her layered shag every six weeks. "If I were hurting financially I'd cut out something else," she said.

And indeed, Westchester's pricier salons are holding their own, including José Eber (haircuts, \$85 to \$120 for women, \$65 to \$75 for men) and Elizabeth Arden Red Door Salon and Spa (haircuts \$97-\$115), also in The Westchester.

Leah Fretwell, Elizabeth Arden's general manager, said she was pleased with the salon's growth since it opened a year ago. "This is a difficult climate for opening a salon but we've been doing well," she said.

Omar Roth, sales director and stylist at José Eber, reported that the last year was one of the salon's busiest.

"I can't figure it out," he said. "But hearing the bonuses our clients receive, the value of their homes, you realize what we're charging is nothing for them."