

Barber wins right to continue haircuts for the homeless

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HARTFORD, Conn. (RNS) Every Wednesday around 5 p.m., the homeless start lining up in Bushnell Park. They come for the free food provided by local churches and to see a man known as “Joe the Barber.”

For the price of a hug, 82-year-old Anthony Cymerys gives the men a free haircut and a shave. But those who line up say he gives them much more.

“He gives a person a sense of well-being and makes them look good and feel good about themselves,” said Gervase Jennings, who is homeless and one of Cymerys’ loyal customers.

Last week, Hartford police and health officials moved to shut him down because he doesn’t have city permits. Mayor Pedro Segarra intervened and allowed him back into the park. On Wednesday (June 19), Segarra stopped by the park and got a hug from Joe.

Cymerys has been setting up a make-shift barber shop in Bushnell Park for 25 years with nothing more than a battery to charge his razors and clippers, a beach chair and a duffel bag stocked with aftershave and alcohol.

A retired business man from Windsor, Conn., Cymerys quotes Jesus when asked why he cuts the hair of those who have lost their way in the world.

“Do unto others as you would have them do to you,” he said.

Robin Nason, who was homeless for years until a friend took her in, wishes there were more people like Joe the Barber in the world.

“You can’t ask for a kinder or more gentle person than Joe,” she said.

Salvatore Pinna, who has been coming to see Joe for three years, can’t decide if he likes Joe’s hugs or shaves better.

“It’s a combination of both,” Pinna said.