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How a St. Croix Barber Went From Trimming His Father's Hair to Winning the Biggest Competition in the World

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Professional Barber Carlos Flores, center, at the Connecticut Barber Expo, held at the Mohegan Sun Casino.

From St. Croix to the U.S. mainland, Carlos Flores has been making waves in the barbering industry. From humble beginnings, cutting his father's hair as a teenager, to winning accolades at some of the biggest barbering competitions, Flores' journey is nothing short of inspirational.

Flores began his career as a barber when he was 15 years old while living his with parents in the Bethlehem Village housing community on St. Croix, also known as the Harvey Project. One day, an unexpected summons came from his father, “out of the blue” as Flores puts it.

“He asked me to cut his hair...at first I thought he was playing with me but then he actually had the machine in his hand,” said Flores. His mother, the family barber, was tired that day, and his father needed some length taken off.

Nervous, Flores set up his first client using a bedsheet as a cape, and went to work. As he ran the clippers through his father’s hair, once and then a second time, he realized that he had stumbled onto his life’s passion. “I really did fall in love with barbering right there and then,” the award-winning barber told Consortium journalists.

In his quest for clients outside his immediate family, the then-15-year old Flores began cutting the hair of his friends and neighbors for free, before honing his skill and gathering sufficient courage to attach a \$3 fee to each cut. One day, a call from a cousin gave Flores the opportunity to work in his first barber shop - Sharp Cuts in the Sion Farm area. Under the supervision of its owner Bryce Rogers, Flores says he learned customer service and the fundamentals of the trade.

After moving to a few different shops, he eventually jointly founded [Karibbean Kuts](#) with some colleagues. Flores described his barbershop as “one of the best places I’ve worked in my life...I find the real, real purpose of the barbering.”

Karibbean Kuts integrated itself into the community by establishing weekly in-service days. Every Monday, Flores and the other barbers would travel – to [public schools](#), homes for the elderly, the Boys and Girls club, [among others](#) – to ensure that everyone who needed them could receive the services of a barber. “Going into the public school and seeing the children that grew up the way I did – not good financially – and we could give them nice, professional free haircut...watching their smiles and stuff, that really made me feel happy,” Flores said.

When Flores learned that barbers could test their skills against each other in a competitive setting, he began imagining himself in that arena. Time and time again, however, his ambitions in that regard were frustrated. “Every time we plan to go to one, for some reason, something happened, something came up. We couldn't make it,” he said. That changed one day when he was vacationing in Florida with a friend and colleague, who told him about a barber show and competition that was happening in the Orlando area. They decided to go, and upon learning that same-day registrants were being accepted for the competition, Flores ultimately decided to enter. “I was so, so nervous, my hands started to shake,” he recounted. “But the experience was everything.” He didn’t place that day, but that didn’t really matter, Flores said.

In December 2021, Flores left Karibbean Kuts and St. Croix, seeking to establish himself on the mainland. Starting over in Florida wasn’t easy, as he now had to rebuild a client base from scratch. However, having armed himself with exactly that expectation prior to arriving, Flores said he just set out to do what he does best - providing skillful haircuts. “I’m going around and even offer[ing] a couple free cuts just for people to see what I have to offer,I” he told the Consortium. “Yes, in the beginning it was rough, but then little bit by little bit, with hard work and being consistent, people started to spot the talent.”

Flores’s island flair, he says, quickly enamored him to his customers. “Our way to communicate is different,” he explained. “Some people were actually surprised with how friendly I was with them.” Flores also noted the different preferences in style and technique exhibited by customers from different cultures, as well as skills and services offered by his fellow barbers from different parts of the world.

A few months after his arrival, Flores got the opportunity to participate in another barbering competition, this time in Pennsylvania. His entry into the freestyle category earned him the

judge's favor. "I start with a line, and I ended up doing a whole freestyle with it and the judges chose it to be the number one haircut that night. And that's when everything began."

That win fueled Flores's yearning to test his skills in a competitive setting. "I was super pumped up. I was so motivated," he recalled. "Yeah, that was the beginning of it. I knew I had more to come, and today thank God I have six trophies."

His latest trophy came on the biggest stage of them all. On May 22, Flores competed at the Connecticut Barber Expo, held at the Mohegan Sun Casino. "I had no models," he recounted. But then, "I found somebody – I found somebody right there in the crowd." Once again, Flores's work found favor with the judges.

"When they called out my number and said barber number six, it was like a dream. To actually place in this barber show, in the biggest barber show in the world, it was like a dream come true. God is so good.. I've been asking God for moments like this. And it's happening!" Flores exclaimed.

Combining his warm personality, ability to connect with people, and his ability to deliver award-winning haircuts has led Flores — a year and a half after his relocation — to feel comfortably established in his new community. "You know, God is good. My schedule – I'm not fully 100%. But I am busy, I can provide for my family...we're in a good position right now."

But even after having conquered the largest stage in his profession, Flores is far from finished. "I want to do more," he says. "Now I want the world to know where I came from. The barber world – the people that know me, the people that are following me – I want them to know where these barbering skills came from: St. Croix Virgin Islands."

To that end, Flores says he will, later this year, host the first barber expo in St. Croix, with the goal of fostering a culture of exchange – barbers coming into the territory as well as Crucian barbers heading out to compete in shows across the country. In the longer term though, Flores's focus is on educating future generations of barbershop professionals.

"I want to be able to open a school on St. Croix and teach the young kids, show them that barbering is a good professional career. It's not like back in the days. Once you're serious, you could make a good amount of money and you can live a good life."

He urged children who may be interested in the trade to follow their heart. "Push for it. Don't let nobody else change your mind. Please be consistent with it, and learn to love the craft. If you can learn to love the craft, there will be no stopping you."