



## **Joseph Polcaro**

Joseph Polcaro was born and grew up in a small village in the Campagna region of Italy. He has memories of wartime in his town, and the hard times afterwards when he helped feed the family by climbing trees to pick fruit. In 1950, when he was 14, Joseph and two sisters were sent to Boston to live with their aunts. After high school, he signed up for a course in hair styling, earned a professional license, and worked in the Boston area. He became a US citizen in 1955 and was drafted into the US Army in 1958. He spent most of his service time at Fort Bragg, NC.

In 1961, Joseph received a call from the owner of a Chapel Hill beauty salon, asking if he would be interested in a position at the shop. He was not familiar with Chapel Hill – other than it was the home of the University – but he decided to take a chance on a new place. He moved to Chapel Hill, marrying and bringing with him the young woman he met in Lumberton. Joseph worked in several shops along Franklin Street, building a loyal clientele with his expertise and lively conversation. In 1970, he purchased the property at 205 N. Columbia Street, which he converted into the hair salon where he has served his Chapel Hill customers for 45 years. He and his late wife raised a family of two sons and a daughter.

Joseph has been an astute businessman, investing wisely in Chapel Hill real estate and maintaining an interest in downtown development. He was one of the few voices not opposed to the location of the

homeless shelter at the corner of Columbia and Rosemary. He is a good neighbor to the facility and often provides part-time work for the residents.

When he first came to Chapel Hill, Joseph joined an adult soccer league to continue the sport he enjoyed as a boy in Italy. He eventually was offered the chance to referee, and he has officiated at school and league games and tournaments for 25 years.

In 1990, Joseph began his 25-year association with local Special Olympics, in part because his younger son benefitted from Special Olympics activities. Joseph coaches the soccer team, and in his first year, the group earned the gold medal for Orange County. He also coaches Special Olympics basketball and softball, and twice a year takes a group of skiers to the state and regional competitions. He helps his teams perform to the best of their ability – not just as coach but as friend, teacher, and mentor.

Joseph makes clear that his work with Special Olympics has given him great rewards. He has seen the thrill of achievement by many local youngsters and has watched them develop new confidence and skills. He has an easy way and a quick smile, and his encouragement and support of the athletes have made a difference in their lives, and Joseph would say, in his own.

Joseph has loved Chapel Hill since he first arrived. He acknowledges that living here among many bright people has helped him grow and learn. “The town has been good to me.” He knows that Chapel Hill will grow, but hopes that it will be “good growth” with some control. He also hopes that the University and town will continue working together for the betterment of all its citizens.